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BEHIND AN EASTERN VEIL

„Land meiner seligsten Gefühle,
Vom reinsten Morgenthau bestreut,
Umsäufelt von des Himmels Kühle,
Und von der Fantasie geweiht.
Land meiner Jugend, ach! verschlossen,
Auf ewig bist du mir;
So schnell ist mir dein Glück verflossen;
Und weinend sehn' ich mich nach dir.“

—*The Song of the Wanderer.*

BEHIND AN EASTERN VEIL

A PLAIN TALE

OF EVENTS OCCURRING IN THE EXPERIENCE OF A LADY
WHO HAD A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY OF OBSERVING
THE INNER LIFE OF LADIES OF THE
UPPER CLASS IN PERSIA

BY

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'IN THE LAND OF THE LION AND SUN' (MODERN PERSIA)
'PERSIA AS IT IS,' ETC.

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PREFACE.

It may be well that I should state that the descriptions of things Persian in this book are absolutely accurate. The episode of the "Crown of Glory" really took place; while the account of the great earthquake in Shiraz is given from the lips of one who was present at that appalling catastrophe. Strange things are here described, but they have happened, and will happen again: nothing is exaggerated, nothing overdrawn, in this *Plain Tale* of life in Persia. As to the spelling of Persian words, the example of Morier is followed, and they are spelt as pronounced, no attempt at transliteration having been made.

C. J. WILLS.

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CHAPTER I.

PREFATORY.

I KNOW very well that what I have to tell can only be of interest as a description of things seen and done in out-of-the-way places in an out-of-the-way country. I do not presume to attempt to write an autobiography, for I know that I am not even a personage, that I have not the pen of a ready writer—and I have no wish to emerge from my present position of tranquil quiet and obscurity. It has been my fortune to have lived the life of an Eastern woman of position, and to have numbered among my friends, and, alas! among my enemies, many of the wives and daughters of the great territorial nobles and high officials in Persia: in that country there are no mere acquaintances—people are your friends or your enemies.

There is one thing I have to say before proceeding with what I have determined to call my *Plain Tale*; I wish to state definitely that I am not, and have never been, a Mohammedan, and the reports that have been persistently put about, that at any period of my career I became a renegade, either from conviction, from compulsion, or to serve my own ends, I now most distinctly and solemnly deny. It is quite true that my sympathies are with the unfanatical Mohammedans whom I have known so well, with whom I have lived, and who have been so kind to me. To my mind, to use a vulgarism, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. The Mohammedans I have known were, with some few exceptions, rich and poor alike, exceedingly charitable, good fathers, loving and dutiful sons, tender and affectionate mothers, and obedient and virtuous daughters and wives. I cannot boast of a general knowledge of the East, but in Persia, where I resided for some years from the age of sixteen, certainly to my mind the Mohammedan does not compare unfavourably with the English Christian. After all, as the Persians say, "Are we not all slaves of God?" No Mohammedan does aught but reverence the founder of the Christian religion; like the Jews and Unitarians, the Mussulman accepts only one God. To the minds of

Europeans generally, and particularly to the mind of the untraveller Briton, Mohammed is a false prophet, an impostor, the inventor of the attractions of a sensual paradise, a personage only one shade less dark than the enemy of mankind himself. What the majority of English people seem to have no knowledge of, is the fact that Mohammed the Sage gave a simple pure theism to innumerable nations of idolaters; he became their chief, their warlike and successful chief: they needed a prophet and an oracle; he became their prophet and oracle. Hygienic rules were utterly neglected; he gave them a sanitary code which he borrowed from Moses; he found them dirty, he left them a people whose cleanliness was a part of their religion,—a people who really believed in the efficacy of frequent prayer, and who *could not* pray unless their preparatory ablutions were completed. Before Mohammed's time, charity in Arabia was an unknown virtue; it is now uniformly practised as a matter of course throughout the Mohammedan world: no beggar is ever sent hungry away even from the hut of the poorest peasant. The Arabs, before Mohammed's time, were merely ferocious, idolatrous banditti, who plundered and murdered, or sold into slavery, those of their neighbours who were unable to resist them. Mohammed changed

all this : he introduced law and order ; he inculcated and practised mercy and justice ; and he merely used the religion he invented, arrogating to himself the title of the "Prophet of God," as a means to an end. I love the Mohammedans, and I am not ashamed of it ; but I have never adopted their religion, though I have often been pressed to do so ; and I might have done it with impunity—it would have been greatly to my personal advantage, and nobody would have been any the wiser.

And now I have to make an apology. My *Plain Tale* was written at odd moments, simply as a pastime and for my own amusement ; it is placed before the public at the suggestion of partial friends who read my manuscript from curiosity. These reminiscences of my life in the East were strung together higgledy-piggledy (pardon an ignorant woman's phrase, but it is an expressive one). I kept no diary during my residence in Persia, I made no notes, and I had no idea, after the first year of my life in the East, that it would ever be my fortune to return to Europe ; so I must confess, once for all, that I speak from memory : but I have a good memory, and I have never known it to play me false. The names of the persons who are mentioned in this real narrative of my life are concealed under pseudo-

nyms, and in order to render it absolutely impossible to identify them, in no case are the names employed the correct ones. I am sadly afraid that my spelling of Persian words is barbarous in the extreme; my husband, who has read these sheets for the press, attempted at first to correct my orthography, but being a pundit he gave it up in despair; he has taken an immense amount of trouble over the punctuation, in which want of practice had rendered me sadly unproficient; my spelling even isn't what it ought to be; but my excuse is that having worn a veil for some years, and only occasionally coming across an English book or newspaper, or an English-speaking person, the only wonder to my mind is that I could spell at all when I actually wrote my little memoir. But I have been many years in England now, and my spelling has come back to me. I have only to add that I deprecate criticism, and if it be, as is not unlikely, a mistake that these experiences see the light, it must not be put down to an old woman's vanity, but to her yielding too easily to the advice of enthusiastic friends, who were good enough to think that what had interested and amused them could not fail to please the general public.

CHAPTER II.

MY BRINGING-UP.

MY mother died within a year of my birth, and my father, hearing of an opening in the East with fairly good pay and allowances, proceeded to Teheran, leaving me in the care of a lady who kept a boarding-school for girls, and who was a distant relation of his own. My father was a young man, an analytical chemist by profession. During my mother's lifetime he had just succeeded in making both ends meet, and at my mother's death he went to the East with the object of "bettering" himself. The earliest remembrance I have of my father was a little letter he wrote to me when I was seven years old: the letter was dated Christmas Day, and I got it in the following July. My father had carefully printed this document letter by letter, and, young as I was, I succeeded in reading it. How I treasured

that letter! I carried it about till it was absolutely worn out. Every year, on Christmas Day, my father would write to me, and when the letter reached me I invariably answered it by the very next post. I suppose that I was not more unhappy than other girls during my school career. I had no holidays, no relatives or friends whom I could visit, and I had no one to like or love except Miss Methuen herself. She was, as I have said, my distant relative; she was not unkind to me, but she never missed an opportunity of letting me know that my poor father was "very irregular" in his payments. "If you hadn't been a relative, Madge," she would say to me, "I should have sent you away years ago; it's a lucky thing for you, child, that we're related." Then my father would suddenly discharge his liabilities. But one thing he never forgot to do: he invariably sent a present to Miss Methuen, and also a keepsake for me. Well do I recollect the first one—a great, long-haired, ash-coloured cat, with one blue and one yellow eye. Hajji, for so we called him, was the envy of my school-fellows, the universal pet, and, strange to say, as deaf as a post. I learned to play a little upon the piano, to dance, to be fairly clever with my needle; I was grounded in the 'Guide

to Knowledge' and in 'Mangnall's Questions'; I learned history and geography from Pinnock; I had got as far as the Rule of Three in arithmetic; I could say my catechism perfectly by rote, as girls did in those days, without troubling myself very much about its meaning. On Sundays we went to church twice, and we read the 'Churchman's Penny Magazine.' In French I had struggled with Numa Pompilius and Charles XII., and I had surreptitiously, and with the aid of a dictionary, wept over the woes of Paul and Virginia. How many times I read the masterpiece of Bernardin de St Pierre I cannot tell: I woke up early in the morning and devoured it in bed, and I burned out my nightly bit of candle to the very socket, feasting on the long rhapsodies and the glorious descriptions of tropical vegetation. Forbidden fruit has been very dear to all of us ever since the days of Mother Eve. It was all through Paul and Virginia that I went to Persia, and it came about in a very simple manner.

One day a letter for Miss Methuen arrived from my father. I recognised the writing at once, and I felt, as the letter came out of its usual course, for the annual Persian letter had reached me but a month before, that something important had happened. It was a Wednes-

day and a half holiday, and the maid (when I was a girl we always called them maids) summoned me to Miss Methuen's own little sanctum. When I entered, she motioned me to a seat; she didn't say a word for a moment or two; she was very much upset, her eyes were red, and I saw that she had been crying.

"Madge," she said at last, "a dreadful thing has happened. Your father, whom I had always looked upon till now as a man of honour, has forsaken you—he has forsaken you, Madge, and," she added with some asperity, "he has also forsaken me. When he first confided you to my care, and it was very unwillingly that I undertook the responsibility, he made me, what I have always looked upon as, a promise of marriage. 'As soon as money matters are right, Martha,' he said, 'I shall come back to England and marry. In the meanwhile I want you to be a mother to poor Lucy's child.' I had no doubt in the world as to his meaning. There was no disparity, for I was but two years his senior. That, Madge," said Miss Methuen, piteously, pointing to a black silhouette of a boy in a very large collar and an Eton jacket, which hung in a little maple frame over the mantelpiece, "is a portrait of your father at the age of sixteen. I was everything to your father at the age of

sixteen," Miss Methuen added, with a melancholy sigh. "You are no longer a child, Madge," she went on, "and I have to tell you these things. You see, dear, I began to love you as a matter of duty. I found it very hard at first, for you were Lucy's child, the woman who had ousted me from your father's heart. All men are fickle, Madge, as you'll find out when your time comes. But now I've grown to love you, just as though I really were your mother; and, as your father says, you are to choose between us two. He tells me, child, that he is married, for what he terms 'good and sufficient reasons': he doesn't seem the least bit ashamed of himself," she went on, angrily, "and he has given you a Persian princess for a stepmother. I am not to influence you, Madge, one way or the other. If you choose to 'throw in your lot' with him, as he expresses it," she went on, looking at her letter, "he will be delighted to welcome you to his home in the Far East, whither you are to proceed at once. Should you prefer to stay in England, you will remain with me, and he will continue the allowance until you are able to earn your own living. Those are his very words: he has written you a letter, Madge, you had better read it, my poor child, and try to make up your mind. And, dear," added Miss Methuen, and I

could see that she was very much affected indeed, "should you choose to remain in England, I will do my very best to make you happy."

She placed my father's letter in my hand, kissed me on the forehead, and, bursting into a flood of tears, hurried from the room.

I was so astonished that I didn't even open the letter for some minutes. I was very fond of Miss Methuen, and I accepted her theory at once that she had been treated very badly by my father; but the idea of becoming the stepdaughter of a princess was not repugnant to me—on the contrary it fired my youthful imagination, and it made me feel as though I were already almost a princess myself. Then I turned to the letter—I have it still:—

"SHIRAZ.

"MY DEAR MADGE,—You must be getting quite a big girl now, and I hope a sensible girl. I write to announce to you that I have taken a very important step in life: I married a week ago. The lady who did me the honour to become my wife is a great-granddaughter of his late Majesty, Futteh Ali Shah. To be quite honest with you, my dear, I may tell you at once that I do not think that I shall ever return to England, having now

definitely thrown in my lot with the Persians. I feel that I have no right to insist on your expatriating yourself. I know that my dear old friend Miss Methuen has been and will be kind to you for my sake: but your future in England is not likely, I fear, to be a very brilliant one; while here you may be very happy in a barbarous sort of way, for in this country we do not take life too seriously, and there are cakes and ale even for the humblest. It is for you then, my dear, to choose. All I can tell you is, that *I* have never regretted leaving England. As to the life here, you know pretty well what it is from the descriptions in my last two letters; as for the climate, to my mind it is perfection. Your new mamma is so 'good as to send you a thousand compliments; she bids me tell you that she is longing to see you, and that when you come out you will become the Light of her Eyes. I send her message as she gave it me; but everybody in Persia speaks in the language of compliment, so don't let what she says influence you in the very least. Talk the matter over with Miss Methuen, my dear, and if you would rather not leave England do not hesitate to say so. I have written to her fully as to business details, and am, my dear child, your affectionate father,

JOHN METHUEN."

I was dazzled, I was filled with a monstrous pride and a newly-born and wonderfully developed sense of my own importance. I was the step-daughter of a Persian princess, who had declared that I was the Light of her Eyes. I began to wonder whether I was still plain little Madge Methuen, or whether I was entitled (in Persia at least) to one of those high-sounding prefixes or affixes which I had read of in the copy of 'Hajji Baba' that my father had directed Miss Methuen to buy for me on my last birthday. Miss Methuen told me that it wasn't at all the book for a girl to read; but I had devoured it, partly because it was my father's present, and partly because, being a girl, I became deeply interested in the romantic and sensational adventures of the hero. I now knew why my father had sent me the book; he probably wanted me to form an unbiassed opinion of the country.

It took me just a fortnight to make up my mind. It was holiday time, and we had nothing particular to do, so Miss Methuen and I read 'Hajji Baba' aloud to each other; and when we had finished it we came to certain definite conclusions—first, that there was a good deal of risk to human life; second, that men were very frequently executed, and that they were certain at some

period or other of their lives to be bastinadoed; that ladies ate a great many sweetmeats, wore very fine clothes, were closely veiled when they went out of doors, and were not infrequently poisoned, sewn up in sacks and drowned, or flung from lofty towers by their jealous husbands; and that, as a rule, when any of these misfortunes happened to them it was their own fault, poor things. But then they had not received a sound middle-class education, and they had never been "thoroughly grounded." It is not very much to be wondered at that I elected to join my father and the princess his wife, rather than continue my unfinished education, with an ultimate prospect of becoming salaried assistant to Miss Methuen, with a remote possibility in the far distant future of a pecuniary interest in the business, which, as she honestly told me, only just enabled her to pay her way and make both ends meet. When I announced my determination to Miss Methuen, my dear old friend broke down altogether. She had been perfectly loyal to my father, and had made no attempt to influence me; but now that my determination was fixed, she wept over me just as though I had been her very daughter, who was about to be taken from her for ever. And I vividly remember that one night when Miss Methuen was sing-

ing an old song—which, she informed me confidentially, was “*once* a great favourite of your father’s, Madge”—we had a terrible scene. Miss Methuen began quite bravely—

“You are going far away,
Far away from poor Jeanette;
There is no one left to love me now,
And you will me forget.”

She stopped, burst into tears, which were followed by a violent hysterical attack that frightened me very much indeed, and was absolutely genuine. I and the parlour-maid put poor Miss Methuen to bed, and the cook sat up with her.

The next day my dear old friend recovered her customary calm, and insisted on commencing at once the preparations for my departure. She made me a present of a capital outfit, the greater portion of which she confectioned herself, while the dresses were made by the best dressmaker in the town. I was deeply touched at her kindness, for I knew she could ill afford what to her was a considerable outlay.

“I have carried out your father’s instructions to the very letter, Madge,” she said, “but I am not going to let you go out, as he puts it, ‘in the clothes you stand

up in.' First impressions are everything, my dear ; and I want you to do me credit."

Then Miss Methuen took me to town, and handed me over to the captain of the Ganges, a steamer about to start for Kurrachee and the Persian Gulf : my father had, in a subsequent letter, promised to meet me on this vessel's arrival at Bushire, which is a port of Southern Persia. Miss Methuen liberally feed the stewardess, and begged her to take every care of me : she pressed into my hand a little purse which she had knitted herself for me, and which contained five pounds in gold ; then she kissed me for the last time. " Good-bye, Madge," she said. " I have tried to do my duty by you, dear ; and if anything should happen to your father, and you find yourself alone in the world, there is always a home ready for you here in dear old England, Madge ; don't forget that, dear. And as for him, tell him that I hope he'll be happy, very, very happy, and that I'm sorry for him, and that I'll try and forgive him." And then my dear old friend was hurried over the gangway by one of the officers, and the steam whistle blew three times, and gongs sounded loudly from the engine-room, and our paddles began to revolve slowly ; and I stood at the side of the poop-

deck kissing my hand to Miss Methuen, who was waving her handkerchief. But I soon lost sight of her, and as the great steamer moved slowly out into the river I wept bitterly, for I felt afraid on finding myself alone in the world for the first time.

CHAPTER III.

MY VOYAGE TO PERSIA.

MISS METHUEN had formally placed me in charge of Captain Cooper; I sat next to him at dinner, and for the first time in my life I was "made a fuss of." I had bade good-bye to poor Miss Methuen perfectly convinced of the fact that I was a mere child and nobody, a *quantité négligeable*. As soon as I lost sight of her, as by a touch of an enchanter's wand, I found myself a young lady, a person to be courted, considered, and admired, and all in the superlative degree; that I was the Queen of the ship, the only lady on board. I was no longer addressed as Madge, I became Miss Methuen, and I was formally introduced to all the passengers. To me it was just as great and happy a change as that which the fairy godmother wrought for poor Cinderella: but it wasn't owing to a pair of glass slippers—it was entirely

due to the admirable foresight of Miss Methuen, who had made my skirts long for the first time, because I was a "growing girl." Nobody found me out—I was a young lady for the whole of the voyage. For the first week I was dreadfully ill; I endured the terrors of the Bay of Biscay, I declined to leave my berth, and I wondered whether it were possible that Virginia could have endured sufferings such as mine on board the *St Geran*; if so, I felt absolutely certain that her subsequent shipwreck and death must have come as a happy release. But even the Bay of Biscay doesn't last for ever; the Ganges ceased to roll, and I tottered on deck leaning on the arm of the sympathising stewardess. I was installed in a comfortable lounge-chair by the captain, who wrapped my feet up in a big shawl; the five passengers crowded round me and inquired in the most anxious manner after my health, expressing their intense delight at my reappearance: one handed me a sunshade, another brought me a footstool, while a third was ready with a glass of champagne and a dry biscuit. The sun was shining brightly, the sky above was a deep blue, and the ship itself seemed to have undergone an astonishing transformation. When I had come on board, the deck had been littered with packing-cases, hen-coops, ropes,

and chains; it was black with coal-dust, the numerous brass-fittings had looked green and tarnished, and everything had seemed damp, dirty, and uncomfortable. Now the deck was white as driven snow; the luggage and hen-coops had been all carefully stowed away; the brass, of which there was a great deal, glittered like gold in the strong sunlight; while the deck-houses of dark carved wood had been furbished and polished till they would have delighted the eyes of the most captious housewife. The Lascar crew looked bright and neat in their white garments and red turbans; there was nothing of the distressed Asiatic about them now, and even their bare brown feet seemed only a part of a becoming Eastern costume. The captain himself was in uniform, and looked quite dashing in his gold-lace cap. From that moment I began to enjoy myself, and if ever a girl was happy in her life it was Miss Margaret Methuen, recently promoted from short frocks.

I don't suppose that there was anything particularly novel or interesting in my voyage out; to me, however, it was all new, charming, and delightful. One or other of the passengers would give me his arm in my frequent promenades on the great poop-deck; and, in order to prevent rivalry, they settled it among

themselves to take this privilege in turn. All my fellow-passengers were bound for Kurrachee, they were all going to India upon business, and it greatly astonished me that not one of them had any information whatever about Persia except a Mr Reece, who was what is called an Uncovenanted Civil Servant. He informed me that he had actually passed an examination in the Persian language, and that he could both read and write it. "I know nothing about the colloquial yet, Miss Methuen," he said, "and at present I can only read and write. But if you would like to learn Persian, I know sufficient to teach you; and I have got a 'Gladwin's Persian Moonshee,' and you can't do better than begin at once." I was only too glad to accept his kind offer, and during the rest of the voyage, as far as Kurrachee at least, we studied Persian with a praiseworthy assiduity. Within the next twenty-four hours each of the four other passengers took opportunity to tell me privately and confidentially that he thought Mr Reece had taken a very unfair advantage, and each one felt it his duty to put me on my guard against him.

I was too young to have had any designs upon Mr Reece's heart,—I simply seized what I looked upon as a golden opportunity. I felt that it would

be a great thing indeed for me to have learned something of the language of the country in which I naturally supposed that I should pass the rest of my life; above all things, I was anxious to please and astonish my father, and the princess, my stepmother. "She can never feel like a real mother to me," I thought, "till we can talk to each other," so I learned my alphabet in forty-eight hours. And oh what a relief it was to me to find out subsequently that there were no genders, only one declension, one conjugation, and no irregular verbs. I found out too, that, as the vowels are not written but only understood, each word was in itself a delightful puzzle of a more or less complicated nature. I will give an instance: in English *c a t* spells cat; in Persian, to produce the sound one writes a *k* and a *t*, so *kt* stands for cat—but then it *may* stand for ket, kit, kot, kut, &c., which, to say the least, is puzzling to the beginner, however enthusiastic. Persian writing, in fact, is a sort of stenography that takes a good deal of patience to acquire, and a Persian letter is an enigma that even an educated native has to go over quietly to himself before he is able to read it aloud correctly. I must confess, too, that the short stories which I read in Gladwin

rather made my flesh creep; they generally ended somewhat in this way: "The king smiled, and ordered him to receive a large reward;" or, "The king smiled, and ordered him to receive a thousand blows;" or, "The king smiled, and ordered him to be immediately executed." I noticed that hardly anybody but the King ever smiled; it is perhaps not to be wondered at under the circumstances. Then again I came to the conclusion that Persia must be a very poor country, for the coins mentioned were invariably the *toman*, a gold piece worth half a sovereign, and the *dinar*, which Mr Reece told me was the thousandth part of a shilling. I didn't think much of the liberality of the King of Persia, who, when a peasant brought him a fish of phenomenal size, ordered him to receive a reward of two *dinars*; and I was puzzled to know the reason why the peasant smiled and expressed his great gratitude. "That's because you don't know the East," said Mr Reece; "there peasants *have to smile* and express their gratitude, or it is the worse for them."

I didn't set my cap at Mr Reece the least little bit in the world, as I have said—I was too young to do so; I

simply was anxious to learn the Persian language, and of course we were thrown very much together, and we made it a rule in our conversations that, to enlarge my vocabulary, I should always use Persian words when speaking to Mr Reece. How proud I was on the first occasion I could do this publicly; I remember it well, though it is many years ago now. "*Khardel bide mun*," I said, looking at Mr Reece with a triumphant smile. "*Cheshm*," he replied, with a low bow, handing me the mustard. Then I heard, I actually heard, Mr Watkins, the Welsh army doctor, whisper to the captain, "Puss is an outrageous little flirt." The idea of his even thinking of a young lady, whose stepmother was a princess, as "Puss," upset me. "Mr Watkins," I said, severely, "I assure you I only asked Mr Reece to pass me the mustard, and he merely replied, 'On my eyes be it.' " "I hope he likes the mustard on his eyes," said the Doctor, drily.

I very soon learned to read aloud correctly from the printed character where the vowels were expressed by points, without having the slightest idea of the meaning of what I was reading. And Mr Reece was never tired of what he called perfecting my pronunciation, insisting

on my reading aloud to him from the poetical selections at the end of the book. There was one exercise that was a particular favourite of his ; its title he translated as " Pearls of Melody, being a Dialogue between the Bulbul and the Rose." We read the stanzas in turn. He was very particular over these poetical exercises, which only commenced when we were ten weeks out from London (there was no Suez Canal in those days). " Try that last stanza once more, Madge," he said (he had to call me something, and he couldn't be always calling me Miss Methuen, and from Miss Margaret he had gradually got to Madge. I shouldn't have allowed it for a moment if I had been a year or two older ; but we were master and pupil, and being but a " growing girl " it seemed quite natural to me). I repeated the stanza, and as I did so a beatific expression spread itself over his handsome face. " It is quite perfect now," he said, " and you have got the rhythm exactly ; rhythm is everything in Persian poetry, it goes straight to the heart," he added, sentimentally. " Once more, only once more," he went on, as though my rendering of this unknown tongue gave him peculiar satisfaction, and as if I were conferring a very great favour.

I read the stanza out once more.

"Beautiful! beautiful!" he said, in a dreamy sort of way.

"Do you mind translating it to me, Mr Reece, what it is that the Rose says to the Bulbul? It sounds very pretty, but you have all the fun to yourself."

"Oh—ah—yes," he replied, in some confusion, and looking rather shamefaced. "Well, you see," he said, as he held out his hand for the book, and as our fingers accidentally met he blushed violently,—“let me see, the *exact* rendering, Miss Methuen, is—

‘Abide with me for ever, lodestar of my existence,
For without thee, Light of my life, the world is an eternal night.’”

I was very angry indeed; girl as I was, I felt that he had been taking a mean advantage of me, and that I, *without knowing it*, had been making violent love to him *in Persian* for the last fortnight. "How horrid!" I cried, in my just indignation. I fled straight to my cabin and had a good cry. I didn't have another Persian lesson for four-and-twenty hours; then he apologised to me most handsomely, and I recommenced my studies.

Girls will be girls, you know.

I don't know that I have very much to say about the voyage that hasn't been said hundreds of times before. We stopped a single night at Cape Town to coal, but I had no opportunity of going ashore, having no one to chaperon me, and we started at ten the next morning, so I had to content myself with admiring the distant view of Table Mountain. If it had not been that I was studying Persian in serious earnest, I think I might have fancied that Mr Reece had amused himself by making love to me; but I was too young then to think of that sort of thing, and it was only on the steamer's leaving Kurrachee for the Gulf, when I became the only European passenger, that it dawned upon me that there was something more than mere kindness to a friendless girl in Mr Reece's proceedings. When he left the ship for the last time, he handed me a little parcel which he adjured me not to open till the following day, and I noticed that, as we said good-bye, his manner was a little *empressé* and solemn. We were fifty miles upon our road towards the Persian Gulf when I opened the little packet: it contained a tiny gold brooch in the form of a little rose of carved Scinde-work, on the back of which, beautifully engraved

in the Persian character, was the dreadful stanza addressed by the Rose to the Bulbul. How I blushed as I looked at the words, knowing what they meant, as I gazed at the first article of *real* jewellery I had ever possessed. There was a letter in the packet, which ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR MADGE,—I must apologise to you for the first and last time for calling you by your pet name; the first time I was weakly wicked enough to do it was, when I merely looked upon you as a little girl to whom I was attempting to teach Persian, as a pastime, and out of pure selfishness. If I had been just a little bit better off than I am, if I were not crippled with debt, and if I were not going to be stationed in an exceedingly unhealthy district, I should certainly, dear Miss Methuen, have asked you to be my wife; as it is, things must be as they are, and I have no right to address you as my dear Madge any longer. You can't think how much I shall miss my little pupil, and I shall never forget the happy time I spent on the Ganges. I asked you not to open this till you started, lest you should have refused to accept my little keepsake. I cannot trust myself to write more; a

wretched Uncovenanted at two hundred and forty rupees a month has no right to be sentimental.—Believe me, dear Miss Methuen, yours very sincerely,

“FRANCIS REECE.”

When I read the letter I nearly dropped the brooch ; I had actually had an admirer without knowing it ! And then it struck me that Frank—I confess that I was abandoned enough for the moment to think of him as Frank—was excessively good-looking ; and what could he mean by talking of his poverty when he actually had the princely income of two hundred and eighty-eight pounds a-year ? Why, Miss Methuen’s French mistress only got twenty-two pounds a-year and her washing, and she had a pure Parisian accent and came from Belgium ; and I wondered whether Frank was allowed his washing by the East India Company. And then I felt what a weak, wicked, worldly girl I was to think of such things at all, and that my youth and inexperience were my only excuse, and that, as Miss Methuen would have said, I had been sacrificing to idols. But then I thought, and the thought gave me a considerable amount of consolation, that Mr Francis Reece was a very nice

and presentable sort of idol after all. Whether I threw the letter into the sea as a well-brought-up young lady would have done, or whether I put it under my pillow at bedtime, I shall not divulge: one thing I do not mind confessing, I still wear the little brooch.

I am afraid that, during the past few weeks, I had become so engrossed with my Persian lessons as to have almost forgotten the fact that I was shortly about to make the acquaintance of a long-lost father. Till now I had looked forward to the meeting with my father with unmixed pleasure and satisfaction; but as the time drew nigh, I began to feel sufficiently diffident and uncomfortable. I wondered whether he would be satisfied with me. As I read over his last letter again and again, I could not help coming to the dreadful conclusion that it was a matter of indifference to him whether I came out or not; still, of course, I must make allowances for the difficulties of his lofty position. I had often heard Miss Methuen say that the Prince Consort must find his situation sufficiently embarrassing. It was true my father was not married to a queen, but then his wife was a foreign princess and an Oriental, which might make matters worse; and he would probably have enemies at the Persian Court who envied

him his great good fortune. I tried to pump the captain.

"Have you ever met an Eastern princess, captain?" I said to him, one day.

"Well, miss, I can't say I have," he replied, scratching his head; "leastways, only once."

"Was she nice?" I asked.

"Well, she was a fine-looking woman, miss," said the captain; "a great strapping wench, who could carry a couple of hundredweight on her head. I saw her at Bombay—her name was Princess Britannia; she was the head of a gang of female coolies that coaled us; a real whopper of a woman she was. She is the only oriental princess I have had the honour of meeting, and she smoked a short pipe, and could take her tot of rum, and dyed her wool a bright yellow with quicklime; she wasn't the sort of woman to trifle with, was Princess Britannia, she was a full-blooded Coromantee black."

He made my flesh creep. Perhaps my new step-mother was a "whopper," perhaps she smoked a short pipe, took her tot of rum, and dyed her hair yellow with quicklime. I didn't ask him any more questions about oriental princesses; I was afraid to.

When we got to Lingah, which is in the Persian

Gulf, I was invited by the captain to go ashore with him. We had anchored some two miles from the land, and it was the hottest day I had ever yet experienced. From the ship, Lingah looked quite poetical; there was a grove of palm-trees several miles in length, and a long line of what appeared to be white marble houses: as our boat drew near the place, I found they were merely mud hovels whitened with lime; and as we got gradually nearer the shore, the insupportable smell (being a lady I cannot use the Johnsonian word, which is much more appropriate) of decaying fish was something more easily imagined than described. The people were mostly copper-coloured or black, and to my inexperienced eyes seemed but half-naked savages. We were entertained at lunch by the ship's agent, *and we brought the eatables from the ship*. I tasted some native sweetmeats out of curiosity; castor-oil seemed to have entered largely into their composition. That night I had dreadful dreams in which a permanent fish diet varied by native sweetmeats, and the Princess Britannia as a near relative, terrified my childish imagination. Three days more brought us to Bushire, which is actually in Persia. Bushire was a much larger place than Lingah, but, like the latter port, its houses seemed to be built entirely of

mud, and they were larger, though they didn't whiten them, and the town seemed sufficiently grim and dismal ; but it was a large and populous place, with innumerable native craft lying at anchor, and one of the East India Company's gunboats lay off the British Residency, which was a long low building of two storeys, built of bright yellow mud. The agent's boat came for the mails, but though I anxiously inquired for Mr Methuen, neither of the agent's clerks, who now came on board, could give me any information. I grew anxious and upset ; but now a small boat drew up at the gangway, a tall yet burly pale man, with a long glossy black beard, wearing a huge white turban and dressed in a suit of quilted cotton, over which he wore a striped camel's-hair cloak, stepped on board in an exceedingly dignified manner and marched straight up to the captain ; he handed him a letter and made him a low bow. The captain read the letter, and then passed it to me, with an enclosure addressed to myself ; the letter ran as follows :—

“To the Captain, Mail Steamship Ganges.

“SIR,—Please hand over my daughter and luggage to bearer ; he will defray any incidental expenses she may

have incurred during the voyage, and see her safely ashore.—Yours faithfully, JOHN METHUEN.”

The letter to me was even more brief :—

“DEAR MADGE,—The bearer will see you safely ashore.—Your affectionate father, JOHN METHUEN.”

“I suppose it is all right, miss ?” said the captain.

I assured him that it was all right, and he ordered my luggage to be put into the boat.

“I suppose this is your father’s head man,” said Captain Cooper. “You wanted to see a Persian ; this is the real article,” he said, indicating the dignified-looking man with the long black beard. “They are all on the same pattern, as proud as Punch and as poor as Job.”

And then I bade farewell to Captain Cooper, and thanked him for his kindness ; and the old fellow kissed me, and insisted on my accepting a big jar of preserved ginger. And then I followed the man with the big black beard into the boat, and we shoved off ; and I blew kisses to the captain and the officers and the stewardess ; and my heart died within me, for I felt that I was bidding good-bye to civilisation, and that

my oriental experiences had now actually commenced. And why had not my father come to meet me? That seemed strange indeed; I felt that he ought to have come to welcome me: but perhaps, after all, it was contrary to etiquette for a man in his position, being married to a royal princess, to meet anybody, even his own daughter. But I was not in the least alarmed, for there could be no doubt whatever as to the genuineness of my father's letters.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN IN THE WHITE TURBAN.

WHEN we had got some hundred yards from the steamer, the man in the white turban suddenly addressed me in English, to my intense astonishment.

"Miss Methuen," he said, in a low whisper, "please don't express any surprise before the boatmen at my speaking English, and kindly talk in a low tone. I am your father's confidential adviser; I myself have lived many years in England, and it may be a convenience to you to have an English-speaking person with you on your voyage up country. Your father wished you to ask me no questions, and not to converse with me more than is absolutely necessary; he has his reasons," he added, mysteriously. "You feel the sun?" he went on, unfurling a large green cotton umbrella. "Please take this, and give me that dainty little sunshade." Then

he did a very extraordinary thing; he took up a big stone from the loose ballast which lay in the bottom of the boat, closed the sunshade over it, and then, the boatmen's attention being distracted for a moment, he quietly slipped the sunshade over the side, when of course it sank immediately.

"I am sure my father would be very angry——" I began.

"My dear young lady," he said, raising a warning finger, "whatever I may do is done by your father's wish and at his instructions. He will shortly explain everything to you himself in the most satisfactory manner."

Then he took out a very large red cotton handkerchief, in which was folded a sheet of dark-blue silk; this he opened.

"Stand up in the boat, young lady," he said, "place this over your head, and muffle yourself in it; you will find that it entirely covers your dress; there is a hook and eye which will fasten its edge under your chin. Thank you," he said, as I did as I was bid. "Now sit down again." Then he produced a piece of white linen, a yard and a half long and a foot wide; the two top corners of this thing were sewn together. "This," he

said, "is a Persian veil, without which no respectable Persian woman is ever seen out of doors. Try to fancy yourself masquerading as a Persian lady, and remember that when we land no one must catch a glimpse of your face or even the tips of your fingers. Slip the circular upper part over the crown of your head and draw it down tight over your face.

I did as he directed; the thing half blinded me.

"Drag it down a little lower," said my guide.

I now found that I could see through a horizontal slit which came just in front of my eyes; the slit was covered with delicate silk embroidery.

"Now you can raise the veil," said the bearded man, "so as to keep yourself cool; but remember that when we land, which we shall do in ten minutes, you must keep it tightly down, and keep the edges of the blue sheet closely together. Just try it for once. Thank you, Miss Methuen," he said, as I obeyed him; "your father will be pleased. And now not another word as you value our lives," he said, in a tone which did not admit of argument on my part; "we have chattered long enough."

I was terribly frightened; it was all so dreadfully mysterious, and his last remark made my heart go pit-a-

"I had forgotten these," said my guide, hurriedly; "put them on at once over your own.

He handed me a pair of cheap white Berlin gloves similar to those worn by waiters at middle-class festivities.

If I had only been a year or two older, I am sure that I should have fainted there and then; it was not my courage, but my extreme youth, that prevented my doing so. We sat in silence for a few minutes, and then we reached the wharf; then my guide took me by the elbow, helped me out of the boat, steered me, for I was half-blinded by the dreadful white veil, through a crowd of shouting beggars, and then lifted me on to the back of a large white donkey, whose head was held by a ragged and ferocious-looking young man, who carried in his hand a big iron-headed stick, and wore a huge curved dagger thrust into his girdle. Two ragged porters hoisted my boxes on to their backs, and we started, the bearded man walking at my side, with his hand upon the cantle of the high carpet-covered saddle of the donkey.

"Keep your face hidden, and hold tight. Don't speak a word," he added under his breath mysteriously.

I shall never forget that ride; my heart was in my mouth during the whole of that dreadful quarter of an

hour. I was half-stifled, sitting in the hot sun, literally with my head in a bag, and I was greatly afraid of tumbling off the tall white donkey; but the animal ambled along at a great pace, and the ragged ruffian with the iron-headed stick pushed the passengers of the poorer class out of the way, and thwacked numerous donkeys and mules, laden with merchandise and fish, which came from the opposite direction. "No respectable woman would allow her face to be seen for a single instant," had been the hint thrown out for my information by the English-speaking guide. No human eye had succeeded in seeing that sacred face of mine, of that I was perfectly certain—though many a time and oft I had feared that I should tumble backwards off the tall donkey; for, remember, I was practically blind, both hands were occupied, and I had one foot only plunged into a very short stirrup: but I did succeed in being "respectable," though I nearly perished in the attempt. It can be easily understood from this description that I saw next to nothing of the town and its inhabitants. I heard an unintelligible mixture of shrieks, shouts, and cries. Within two minutes of our leaving the wharf we had plunged into an apparently interminable narrow lane, some five feet wide, at times even less. The strong Eastern sun beat down

upon my head, which was only protected by a single layer of the thin blue silk sheet; what had become of my natty little hat I did not know; and ever and anon we appeared to plunge into dark tunnels, only to suddenly emerge again into blinding sunlight. And this was the "Gorgeous East" I had heard so much of! Is it to be wondered at that I was considerably disappointed?

At length we stopped. My guide lugged me—I can use no other word—off the donkey, and again gripping my elbow, steered me through a low doorway in one of the mud walls. We passed through a dark passage and came to a flight of narrow steps, each of which was eighteen inches high.

"You can uncover your face now; try and climb up as best you can," said the bearded man.

I struggled up some dozen steps almost on my hands and knees, and I found myself, on reaching the top, in a little room, the floor of which was covered by a coarse matting of reeds; there was a little carpet of the poorest kind in the corner; on the carpet was a mattress and a big bolster; the one window was a mere square aperture in the mud-wall, and was closed by a piece of matting which admitted just enough light to see by; there was an earthen water-bottle standing in a recess,

and no other furniture of any kind. Then it suddenly dawned upon me that I had been tricked, entrapped, and brought to a dreadful dungeon. I turned to my guide to demand an explanation. Before I could open my mouth, for I was choking with fear and indignation, the bearded man held out his arms towards me, and exclaimed in a cheerful voice, "Well, little woman, come and give me a good honest kiss. How do you like Persia?"

It was my father!

But I couldn't believe it. I possessed a portrait of my father which represented him as a fair man of frail appearance, and the gentleman in the turban and the flowing robes had a beard black and glossy as the raven's wing.

"It's all right, Madge; I'm perfectly genuine, I assure you."

I stared at him in doubt and astonishment; the features were the features of my father, but the big black beard puzzled me.

"But your beard, papa!" I burst forth, only half convinced.

"It's the only thing about me that isn't genuine, Madge," said my father, with a laugh. "Why, if you'd

got a beard, my child, you'd have to dye it in this country ; it's all right, darling," he added, with extended arms. "How did you leave old Patty?"

That convinced me. I rushed into my father's arms, and he smothered me with kisses.

When our first transports of mutual delight were over, my father bade me divest myself of the insignia of respectability, I mean the great blue silk sheet and the white linen veil.

"Let's have a good look at you, Madge," he said. "I'm satisfied,—I'm more than satisfied," he added. "You are wonderfully like your poor mother." And then he paid me several compliments, probably dictated by his natural affection, which my modesty prevents my repeating: most geese look upon their goslings as swans. "Now sit down, my dear, and make yourself comfortable," said my father.

"But, papa," I cried, "there are no chairs."

"There are no chairs in Persia," he replied. "Poor child," he added, "you'll have to learn to do without them. Make yourself as comfortable as you can on the mattress, Madge. Very soon you'll learn to do as I do," and he knelt down on a corner of the little carpet, and seated himself on his own heels. "You wouldn't think

it to look at me," he said, " but I'm perfectly comfortable—use is second nature. You'll soon learn to do without chairs and tables, and knives and forks ; fingers were made before forks," he added, cheerfully. " Now, Madge," he went on, " I want you to be a dutiful child ; I want you to make a few little sacrifices for my sake. I want you for a while to forget that you are an English girl ; I want you to assume the Persian dress and to become, for a time at least, a Persian lady, and I want you to learn Persian as soon as possible. I'll explain my reasons for these things to you afterwards, and I hope to be able to make your life happy and comfortable. Old Patty always said you were a dutiful child ; you won't mind obliging me, will you, my dear ? "

I hastened to assure him of my obedience. He appeared much pleased, and, leaving the room, returned almost immediately with a large bundle tied up in a piece of embroidered silk.

" In this," he said, placing it upon the ground, " you will find the entire costume of a Persian lady—nothing has been forgotten. The things have been laid in order as they are to be put on ; remove every article of your own dress, fold them and place them in this wrapper,

everything even to your shoes and stockings. And now I'll leave you to your toilet; bolt yourself in," he added, "though you will be quite undisturbed. I'm hurrying you in this matter because I know, dear, that you must be in need of refreshment. When you are quite ready, all you have to do is to clap your hands loudly, and then we will have a cup of tea together, and a good long talk."

Then my father left me, and I fastened the door, as directed, by means of a great wooden bolt; then I opened the silken bundle and inspected its contents with girlish curiosity. On the top lay a sort of shirt with long sleeves of fine white cotton, the neck and cuffs of which were beautifully embroidered with an intricate pattern in coarse black silk; beneath this were five mysterious garments of exactly the same size—I soon came to the conclusion that they were the Persian for petticoat; to be more exact, they were the divided garment of which we have heard so much lately from Lady Harberton. The first was of filmy white cotton material; the second was made of the stuff known as Turkey red; the third was of new and unwashed chintz of a staring pattern; the fourth and fifth were of the same material, but of still brighter and more gaudy colouring. Then came an

ordinary skirt of yellow satin—it was the thickest and richest yellow satin that had ever gladdened my girlish eyes; then there was a little zouave jacket of crimson silk velvet with long sleeves, which had cuffs opening as far as the elbow along the seam of the sleeves, along one edge of each of which were some fifty little silver buttons the size of peas. The little jacket was heavily embroidered at the shoulders, neck, and edges, with gold lace of a very expensive description; and what with the buttons and the gold embroidery, small as it was, the little garment was literally heavy with the precious metals: the sleeves of the jacket, which were evidently meant to be worn open, were lined with quilted silk of a pale blue colour. Then there was a tiny filmy silken pocket-handkerchief, green in colour, the edges of which were delicately embroidered in scarlet silk; then came a pair of white cotton *socks*, and an absurd little pair of white kid Turkish slippers, with high red heels, suitable for the foot of a child of eight; then there was a natty little skull-cap, and two big kerchiefs, each a yard square, one of pink silk embroidered with gold, the other of plain black cotton stuff, the uses of which I did not understand; last of all lay a mirror, six inches long by four wide, in an elaborately hand-painted case of *papier-maché*; there

was also a semi-circular small-tooth comb of ebony, finely carved.

I could not complain that my feathers were not fine enough!

I am afraid it was vanity. I put off my simple European garments without a pang, and I put on the various articles of oriental costume, in order, as I had been directed; and as I looked in the mirror I gazed at myself in mingled delight, astonishment, and horror. I resembled a bird of paradise of the most gorgeous description—my amber-coloured skirt provoked the simile. The heels of my absurd little shoes, which were a good two inches shorter than they should have been, rendered it wellnigh impossible for me to walk; but what horrified me, and made me blush involuntarily, was my startling resemblance to the portraits of Madam Vestris as a Bayadère, or Mr Tenniel's illustrations to 'Lalla Rookh.' The most terrible fact of all was that my skirts came to just two inches below my knees, and I blush to add that my legs (*pace*, ye innocent American ladies) were bare. I felt hot and cold alternately all over; no wonder, for I had no *moral* support, and I know British matrons will agree with me when I explain that my corsets were already packed away with the rest of my European

garments, in the big silken wrapper. But I had some compensation even for the loss of my stays—I heard, for the first time, as I moved, the delicious *frou-frou* of my silken outer skirt. Then I discovered with delight that it was provided with a capacious pocket, and into the deepest depths of that great pocket I hurriedly thrust poor Aunt Martha's purse with her, as yet, untouched five golden sovereigns, and Mr Reece's keepsake, the little golden rose. Then I unbarred the door, I sat me down upon my mattress, spreading out my ample but exiguous skirts, for decency's sake; and then, clapping my hands loudly, I tried to look as much like a queen as possible. In a few moments my father entered the room: how he laughed!

“Well, my dear, how do you like your dress?” he said.

I was too much confused and ashamed to answer him.

“But you'll never do like that, you know; as you are now, you represent the height of impropriety.”

I fully agreed with him.

“Where's your hair?” he went on. “Let it all down at once.”

I took off my little skull-cap, and I did as I was bid.

"*Mashallah!*"¹ said my father, as he stroked his big black beard in evident admiration; "you've got plenty of it, thank heaven! Allow me, child," he said. "Put on your skull-cap." Then he deliberately folded the black kerchief and the pink silk embroidered one across the middle, forming them into triangles, and laid them upon my head, the black one inside the silk one, and directed me to hold them together under my chin. "Now, if we had only got a brooch to fasten them with, you would be complete."

With considerable trepidation, I handed him my little golden rose. His eye caught the inscription on the back at once.

"Hafiz," he said, rolling out the couplet with evident gusto; "where did you pick that up?"

"It was bought in Kurrachee," I replied, with great innocence.

"It's the very thing. Don't part with it, my dear; you'll always find it useful for this sort of thing."

"I will take the greatest care of it, papa," I replied, simply.

"And now we'll get you a cup of tea," said my

¹ Praise be to God. *Lit.*, What God pleases. To praise *directly* is considered unlucky, and to cause misfortune.

father; "you must want it. My child, I'm very proud of you!" he added, with a sudden burst of emotion, as he kissed me on the forehead.

When I looked at myself once more in the mirror, which my father bade me do, I was surprised at the extraordinary change that the wearing a large coloured kerchief fastened under the chin can produce. My face appeared almost perfectly circular, and I started at the reflection of my own countenance, and I now realised the meaning of the words "*moon-faced* houri." Angels are our European idea of the beautiful; the houri is the Oriental.

And now an old woman entered the little room with a great steaming, hissing, brass tea-urn. This she placed upon the floor.

"Nanna Rejab," said my father, "this is the little lady I have been talking to you about" (that much I understood). And then the old woman flung herself upon her knees at my feet; she burst into a flood of excited words, of which all I could comprehend was the oft-repeated expression of admiration "*Mashallah!*"—long-drawn-out—and frequent repetitions of the syllable "*Ba!*" which I knew meant delight and satisfaction.

The old woman wore a sort of sheet of coarse cotton,

dyed in blue and white squares, over her head, after the manner of the Irish peasantry. It hung down and concealed her entire costume; but her bare calves and ankles were freely exhibited. Her flow of language was extraordinary, and her gestures were expressive, frequent, and somewhat violent: when she wasn't talking to my father or to me, she would apostrophise the urn, or the tea equipage which she now brought in. She hadn't a tooth in her head this old woman, and if she were silent for an instant, she appeared to be trying to swallow her own tongue, and almost, but not quite, succeeding; her eyebrows were black with paint; her eyelashes, and the skin at their edges, were darkened artificially; her cheeks were painted a very bright red, and her hands, which were like birds' claws, were a deep blackish brown on the palms, which made them look as though they had been picking fresh walnuts; her finger and toe nails were of the same deep brown colour. I watched her preparations for tea-making with considerable astonishment. From a box of inlaid wood she produced a very small silver canister, two tiny cups, two saucers, and a couple of what looked like dolls' teaspoons, the bowls of which had a round hole in the middle; then she nearly filled one of the little cups with strange-

looking tea, which was covered with a whitish bloom, from the canister; then from the box she produced a china teapot, which, at the most, could have held three-quarters of a pint; she carefully washed it within and without in a round bowl of bell-metal, which to my then inexperienced eyes passed for gold; then she actually washed the tea by pouring a little water into the teapot, and pouring it out again; then she filled up the teapot to the very brim, placed it on the top of the urn, and covered it with a small square of embroidered cloth, having a gold fringe; then she produced an octagonal block of carved wood, and from a handkerchief of coarse cotton, which she opened and spread on the matting in front of her, she took the top of a loaf of sugar weighing several pounds, then with a kind of small pickaxe of chased steel she knocked off a piece of sugar the size of a man's fist; in an instant she had placed it on the block and chopped it into large lumps with the toy pickaxe; into each of the cups she put one of the huge lumps of sugar, and half-filled the cup from the teapot; to this she added water from the urn till the contents of the cup overflowed into the saucer; then from the box she took a little silver tray the size of a cheese-plate, and, with low obeisances, handed a cup of tea first to

my father and then to me. The tea was of a pale straw-colour, and tasted like a deliciously flavoured syrup. And when she had done this, having been talking and mumbling the whole time, she furtively took the very largest lump of sugar, thrust it into her own mouth, and left the room.

"What a very extraordinary old woman, papa!" I cried, in astonishment,—“she must be very, very old; and, oh papa, why doesn't she wash her hands, and why does she steal the sugar?”

"I don't think she's so very old, my dear," said my father; "seven- or eight-and-thirty about, I suppose."

"Why, papa, she looks a hundred," I cried.

"Persian women of the lower classes age rapidly, my dear. You see she was probably married at ten; she is the mother of Rejab, the man who led your donkey; and as for her hands, they're clean enough, and are freshly dyed with henna in your honour. It isn't dirt, it's dye, which makes all the difference. In one sense the Persians are the cleanest people in the world; they are always washing themselves. Then as to stealing the sugar, all the eatables are in Nanna Rejab's charge, and she knows that she's welcome to take as much as she likes: like all Eastern women, she's very fond of sugar,

but it wouldn't taste half so sweet if she didn't steal it."

"But why does she paint her face, papa?"

"That's in your honour too, my dear. On festive occasions a Persian woman always paints her face, and the older she is the more paint she uses."

At this moment Nanna Rejab re-entered the room; in her hand she carried a *kalian*, or water-pipe—a hubble-bubble, in fact; the stem, which was of wood dyed a bright crimson, was decorated with tiny unopened buds of the moss-rose; the water receptacle was formed of porous clay, the pipe-head was of silver, and upon the moistened tobacco lay a little heap of live charcoal. The old woman put the pipe to her mouth and took several vigorous pulls at it, and then expelled a tremendous cloud of smoke from her nostrils, and ejected the smoke from the reservoir by blowing down the stem; then she wiped the silver mouthpiece with her veil, and presented it with a low bow to my father; then she poured out more tea, while my father smoked and chatted to me. Each of his sentences was rounded off by the loud bubbling noise made by the *kalian*, just as Mr Albert Smith's engineer with a grievance was in the habit of rounding off his sentences. The

effect was striking, and astonished me considerably at first.

(Bubble, bubble, bubble.) "Nanna Rejab is a wonderful hand at a pipe, my dear (bubble); you mightn't think it, but it's an art, is filling a pipe (bubble, bubble); and it's so cool and refreshing (bubble); everybody smokes here, men, women, and children when they get the chance (bubble). Your stepmother smokes like a blast-furnace (bubble, bubble, bubble). I don't know how we should get on without our (bubble) *kalians*. You see the water cools the smoke (bubble), and this wet earthen bottle cools the water (bubble, bubble); and the tobacco is particularly fragrant (bubble), and even the sound it makes is peculiarly soothing (bubble, bubble, bubble). Ah," said my father, expelling a huge cloud first from the right nostril and then from the left (bubble), "nobody can make a pipe like Nanna Rejab!" (bub-bub-bubble). And then my father, having almost disappeared in a pillar of smoke, handed back the *kalian* to the old woman.

She now offered it to me, having taken a whiff or two herself; but I declined it, to her intense astonishment. My father laughed, and dismissed the old woman with a wave of the hand.

"I hope, my dear," said my father, kindly, "that your surroundings do not alarm you. They are poor and mean enough, heaven knows; but then, you see, there are no hotels in Persia. I have become to all intents and purposes a Persian; Persia is my adopted country, and I have thrown in my lot with the natives altogether. Here, in Bushire, where I am not personally known, I am in everybody's eyes a real Persian. In Shiraz, where I live, I am known to be a foreigner; but I am a Mussulman. That shocks you, my child? Perhaps it will shock you less when I tell you that I did not become a Mussulman by conviction; Islam was *forced* upon me, as it has been forced upon many better men," he added, with a sigh. "I am Aga Abdullah of the Persian Government service, not a rich man, not an important man, but still a person of consideration, my principal title to which consists in the fact that I am married to your stepmother. You are no longer a child, Madge; the Persians are tolerant; while I am alive, no one will attempt to interfere with your religion; but for my sake and for your own sake, if you are to live here with me in peace, you must become to all intents and purposes a Persian lady. You have already assumed the Persian dress; you must adopt the native customs, bow

to native prejudices, and make friends with the native ladies; and then, my dear," he added, with a little laugh, "*if you are ambitious*, there is nothing which you may not aspire to, because you are a very pretty girl, you know."

I blushed and trembled at these mysterious words.

"But," my father continued, "my circumstances may change; it is not altogether impossible that I may be able to return to Europe; that I shall become a wealthy man is more than probable: in that case, should you tire of me, or should you tire of the country, you could go back to old England, and it would be my dearest pleasure to know you happy and properly provided for there. I am talking to you in this way because you are no longer a child in my eyes, and because, though you made your own choice to come out here to me, it is not yet too late to change your mind: the Ganges does not leave till to-morrow at noon, and old Patty will be only too glad to welcome you back."

"Papa——" I began.

"You had better hear me out, my dear, and then make up your mind. It's just a choice between a life of comparative luxury here, and drudgery in England; but there is a certain amount of danger

to life in all Eastern countries; and it is possible that I may find myself suddenly plunged into poverty by no fault of my own: you must take that into consideration, and weigh the chances."

"You and Miss Methuen, father," I cried, "are the only relatives I have in the world; you are my father, and I know that, had you not thought it right for me to come out here, you would never have even suggested it. My mind is made up,—my place is here."

"I think you have chosen wisely, my child," said my father, simply.

Then I threw myself into his arms and burst into tears.

"This little place," said my father, after a while, when he had succeeded in soothing me, "is a wretched hole which I secured on account of its privacy. Had I brought you ashore as a European young lady, I should have created a local scandal; I should have returned home in the midst of a thousand rumours, each more improbable than the other: as it is, I shall come back having brought my daughter with me; nothing is simpler, nothing more natural. My daughter takes her proper place in my household, and the one fear

of my wife that I may suddenly leave her and return to Europe is for ever set at rest; in fact," he added, with a laugh, "you will be a sort of hostage for my good behaviour. And now I'll be off to my own quarters," he said. "I'll send the old woman up to do your hair, and bring you some light refreshment. Then take a siesta, my child—you must need it after all this excitement. Do not attempt to leave the room, and remember, once for all," he added, a little solemnly, "that I am the only man who is privileged to see that pretty face of yours; it's for your own good," he said, with a smile,—“it'll save you a world of trouble, and it's the custom of the country.” Then he kissed me on the forehead, and left the room.

I must confess that my spirits were considerably damped at this last announcement. I felt like a girl who had just taken the veil, but I had done it of my own free will; I had, as it were, solemnly ratified my intention—and I trusted my father. I confess that I did not like the idea of his being a renegade; still, as he had explained, that had been forced upon him, so perhaps he had not been so very much to blame after all. I felt much inclined to cry; but I was young, I was inexperienced, and I

had just found a father; and then the old woman came in — and that settled it. She knelt down in front of me, and addressed me in a long speech, two words only of which I understood; she called me her “soul” repeatedly; then she combed out my hair, and, talking away the whole time and evidently not expecting any kind of answer, she ran her hands through the long tresses with great pride, and then plaited them up into innumerable little tails; then she handed me the mirror, and placing the little skull-cap upon my head coquettishly, she repeated her “*Ba ! Ba ! Ba !*” several times in evident admiration.

Then Nanna Rejab pointed to her mouth, nodded, laughed, and pointed to her mouth again.

I nodded, laughed, and pointed to my mouth; and then, with very considerable pride, I produced one out of my very small vocabulary of Persian words. “*Nahar*,” I said, with great deliberation (now *nahar* means breakfast).

The old woman literally danced with astonishment and delight. “Breakfast, *Ba ! Ba ! Ba !* Yes, my soul, breakfast,” and then she went off into a long oration which I did not understand, but there were a great many *Ba ! Ba ! Ba’s !*—she called me her soul several

times, and then she counted five upon the fingers of one hand with much deliberation.

Then she disappeared, only to return almost immediately with what looked like a huge coffee-pot of silver, and a vessel resembling nothing so much as a very deep soup-plate of the same metal as the coffee-pot, the centre of which was concealed by an ornamental grating; on this grating lay an embroidered napkin neatly folded, and the very smallest cake of scented soap I had ever seen in my life: then she knelt down in front of me, holding out with one hand what really turned out to be the wash-hand basin, and she poured from the long curved spout of the travelling ewer, which I had imagined to be a coffee-pot, a continuous stream of tepid water, while I washed my hands over the basin in the true Eastern manner for the first time, the soapy water disappearing through the holes in the circular grating, *and Nanna Rejab never left off talking the whole time*; she even praised me because I knew how to wash my hands. She now removed the washing appliances and left the room, only to reappear in a few seconds with a great circular tray, a yard in diameter, of tinned copper: there were three basins of coarse china upon it; a copper dish, on which was heaped a quantity of steaming rice,

the largest and whitest I had ever seen; there was a basin of common blue pottery, containing what appeared to be a junket, covered with a thick layer of cream; there was a plate of primitive crockery which held a huge bunch of white grapes, and each grape was nearly two inches long; then there was a big flap of native bread, a yard long and a foot wide and half an inch thick, and evidently hot from the oven; and in this blanket-like loaf, if loaf it can be called, were wrapped four little white skewers, on which were pieces of hot roast-meat the size of a walnut. These various delicacies were indicated by the old woman, and tallied off on her fingers. "One, two, three, four, five," she said triumphantly, as she gave me the name of each dish; the grapes and the junket were evidently extras, and formed, as I rightly supposed, a sort of dessert. There was also a little saucer of pickles, and a little piece of very white-looking cheese in another saucer.

"*Bismillah!*"¹ said the old woman, pointing to the little skewers of roasted meat, and urging me to commence. "*Kabab,*"² she added, Explanatorily.

¹ *Bismillah* = In the name of God.

² *Kabab*, any kind of roasted meat; the varieties of this dish are endless.

I didn't need a second invitation, for I was very hungry. There were no knives, no forks, not even a spoon; then I remembered what my father had said about forks and fingers, I took up one of the little wooden skewers and managed to get through two of the *kababs*; and then I felt that I had breakfasted, but Nanna Rejab insisted on my partaking of the contents of each of the basins: these were stews composed of most extraordinary materials, and were intended to be eaten with the rice, a proceeding which I found to be no easy matter. The first was a knuckle of mutton boiled to rags, and accompanied by a rich sauce or gravy, in which were unripe greengages stewed to a pulp, over which lay a quarter of an inch of butter melted; the second basin held a partridge also boiled to rags, and surrounded by a thick sauce, which I afterwards learned consisted of pomegranate juice, pounded walnuts, and curds, with the same accompaniment of butter melted; the third basin held a tiny chicken boiled to rags, with a thick yellow sauce, being a kind of mild curry, and the inevitable butter melted: these were all hot. As the old woman introduced me to each of these various viands, she repeated the name of it over and over again, and as I mispronounced the

strange names with difficulty after her, she gave me them again with much laughter, till I had got them correctly, which triumph she celebrated by clapping her hands and ejaculating "*Ba ! Ba ! Ba !*" which evidently meant the highest form of praise. I was learning the language with a vengeance ! And now Nanna Rejab drew my attention to a great china bowl which contained an amber-coloured fluid, in which floated a big lump of ice.

"Sherbet," she said.

This word I repeated at once, it presented no difficulties. The sherbet turned out to be a peculiarly delicious and highly sweetened form of *orangeade* ; how different from the "Royal Persian sherbet" of the British sweet-shops ! I drank this sherbet out of an elaborately carved spoon of pearwood, the bowl of which held nearly a tumblerful ; then I toyed with the cheese and dallied with the grapes ; and then I began to feel dreadfully sleepy.

Nanna Rejab, by expressive pantomime, suggested that I should lie down on the mattress and go to sleep. I was not loth to take her advice, and as soon as I had lain down she began to gently shampoo my feet, and to croon out an apparently interminable Persian lullaby.

It ran as follows ; most of the verses were extemporised by the old woman :—

“THE PRINCE OF SHIRAZ.

“The Prince of Shiraz, how nobly kind-hearted !
Deigned to say to Jawad, ‘Where is Mustapha ?’

Jawad humbly replied,

‘Just three days ago, sir, Mustapha died.’

The prince deigned to say,

‘What was his illness ?’

Jawad humbly replied,

‘It was of colic that Mustapha died.’

The prince deigned to say,

‘Who was his doctor ?’

Jawad humbly replied,

‘’Twas of the court physician that Mustapha died.’

The prince deigned to say,

‘Of what was his coffin ?’

Jawad humbly replied,

It was, sir, of plane-wood, with spices inside.’

The prince deigned to say,

‘Of what was his pall ?’

Jawad humbly replied,

‘The pall was of shawl, sir, and quite five feet wide.’

The prince deigned to say,

‘Of what was his shroud ?’

Jawad humbly replied,

‘It was just cotton sheeting, most carefully dried.’

The prince deigned to say,

‘Where is he laid?’

Jawad humbly replied,

‘It is close to the mosque, sir, and easily spied.’”

&c. &c. &c.

And so ran on the apparently interminable colloquy of the Prince of Shiraz and his servant. And long before Nanna Rejab had finished her crooning song I had dropped asleep.

CHAPTER V.

MY FATHER'S HISTORY.

It must have been certainly four o'clock when I awoke. My father was sitting on the ground by the side of the mattress, and he startled me at first by his changed appearance—for he had divested himself of his turban, and wore a sort of tall conical nightcap of white silk embroidered in colours.

"You have slept like a top, Madge," he said. "All who can afford it in this country get through the hot part of the day in that way."

"I was tired," I replied, "and it was very hot."

I now saw that the old woman was lying curled up, asleep, at the foot of my mattress.

"She's a faithful servant, Madge," said my father; "and she or her son Rejab would give their lives for either of us." And then, without awakening the sleep-

ing woman, he began to talk to me about my mother—the mother whom I could not even remember. “Things might have been very different for her, poor thing,” he said at last with a sigh, “if I had been only a little better off. Why, when you were born, Madge, I found it difficult to earn enough to keep the three of us; and between you and me, dear, I’m afraid I rather made a fool of poor old Patty for your sake. And then there was this opening in Persia. I came out as assayer to the Royal Mint, and before I had been in the country six months I found that I couldn’t live on my pay. But now I am fairly comfortable, things have gone well with me; but I am married, and a Mussulman,” he added, with a sigh. “I have become so orientalised, that the old life seems but as a misty recollection, and at times I feel as if John Methuen were dead—that he was but an old incarnation of Aga Abdullah the Persian, who has the honour to be the husband of the Badr-u-Dowlet.”

“Tell me all about it, papa,” I said.

“My dear, it is a long story,” he replied; “and I am afraid I should wear out your patience.”

He didn’t seem the least little bit inclined to begin; but I pleaded, I begged, and coaxed him. I insisted

that I ought to hear the history of his life. Then he made a laughing reference to Bluebeard, and he declared that curiosity was woman's besetting sin; but at length he gradually relented, and commenced as follows:—

JOHN METHUEN'S HISTORY.

“When I first heard that there was an appointment as assayer to the Royal Mint at Teheran, with a salary of two hundred a-year, to be had for the asking, I jumped at the idea, and I hurried to the Persian Legation to make inquiries. I was received by one of the secretaries, who informed me that there had been several applications from men desirous of proceeding to the East, but that not one of them knew anything at all about assaying the precious metals. I soon succeeded in convincing him that I was capable of performing the duties. ‘If that be so,’ he said, ‘and there is nothing against you, and you have no encumbrances, and can produce proper testimonials, I can promise you the berth.’ I told him that I had no encumbrances,—your mother was dead, and old Patty * had taken care of you,—and I offered to produce the required testimonials in twenty-four hours. He seemed

very much pleased, asked me to sit down, and offered me a cigar: then he explained the duties and emoluments.

“‘Your pay will be, as you know, two hundred a-year, which you ought to make as much again as soon as you get your fellow officials into your power, which you are bound to do sooner or later; for every one of the *employés* of the Mint, from the Master downwards, makes money directly or indirectly by debasing the coinage. The gentleman who till lately held the appointment was a Frenchman—a most ingenious person. He used to place all the silver and gold coinage in a bath of acid before sending it out; this process made the coins look both bright and beautiful. Of course a certain amount of the precious metals remained in the bath of acid. A very nice fellow—a charming fellow, I had the greatest respect for him; and he went on, *undetected*, for seven years, and gave the most charming little dinners.’

“‘But he was a thief,’ I objected.

“‘Thief!’ cried the secretary; ‘not a bit of it. He was merely using his opportunities, and, if he hadn’t used his opportunities, he would have been what is worse than a thief—namely, a fool. Ah! my young

friend,' he added, with a laugh, 'when you've been in Persia six months you'll make use of your opportunities.'

" 'And what would be my office hours?' I said, considerably shocked by the man's levity. The secretary laughed.

" 'They are exactly what you like to make them,' he said. 'As long as you regularly attend the official *levees* of the Master of the Mint, you needn't trouble about your other duties. The debasing of the coin is bound to go on; the King orders it to be debased ten per cent from the standard for his own profit (and what's the use of being a king if he can't debase his own coinage, I should like to know?). Then the Prime Minister steals five per cent from the bullion he sends into the Mint to be coined; the Lord High Treasurer has to get his pickings; then it comes to the turn of the Mint officials. Your predecessor, whose pay was two hundred, spent a thousand a-year, and must have saved money as well. And now, let's come to business. What have you got to propose?'

" 'Well,' I said, 'I will bring the certificates in the morning, as you kindly suggested.'

" 'Oh, you needn't trouble about *that*,—that's a mere matter of form. The Ambassador speaks and reads

nothing but Persian, and I shall satisfy him; of course he'll expect a present: we must try and fob him off with promises—you needn't keep them, you know; the real question you have to consider is, 'What are you going to give *me*? What do you say to the first year's salary?'

"It was with the greatest difficulty, Madge, that I restrained my indignation,—the fellow wanted to be bribed; but then one couldn't be angry with him, he was such a polite rascal.

"‘The machine of Government won't move,’ he explained, ‘unless you oil the wheels; and as soon as you're in office, you'll make other people oil *your* wheels. The fact is, between ourselves, I never get any salary,—the Ambassador *eats* mine, that's his perquisite; the Minister for Foreign Affairs eats the greater portion of his, that's his perquisite; whilst the Shah, my master, doesn't pay one black *pul*¹ to the Minister.’ And then for fully half an hour this polite oriental diplomatist and I wrangled over the amount he was to receive. As a last resource I ended by telling him the truth—namely, that I had no ready money to expend in bribes.

"‘That's very unfortunate,’ said the secretary; ‘we

¹ *Pul*, the lowest copper coin current in Persia.

must try and manage it somehow. You see,' he said, taking a document from one of the drawers of his writing-table, 'here is the appointment signed and sealed in due form, and there's the attested French translation on the back of it; all that remains is to fill in the name. You see you'll be entitled to a hundred and fifty pounds for your travelling expenses. It is very unfortunate that you have no ready money: you are quite sure you couldn't raise any?'

"I assured him, unless I pawned my watch, that it was utterly impossible.

"'We have been talking a long while—what time do you make it?' said the secretary.

"I told him the time.

"'Let me compliment you on your watch,' he said. 'It's a very nice watch,' he added, looking at it with longing eyes. 'I think—yes, I begin to think that I see my way. Now you see this document is not dated—we'll antedate it by six months: you'll of course then have half a year's salary to draw,—you will consider that you have received it from the Legation treasury, and give me a receipt in full; in this way the Ambassador will be perfectly satisfied. I will give you a hundred pounds for your travelling expenses in hard cash; you

shall give me a receipt for the whole hundred and fifty ; and, with a hundred pounds in your pocket, you will have no difficulty whatever in reaching Teheran ; and as for the watch and chain, well, if you made me a present of them, I should just fill in your name in this paper, pay you a hundred pounds by the Ambassador's check upon the Bank of England, and there you are. You would have the strongest proof of my sincerity, in the hundred pounds ; and I would show my confidence in you by suggesting that you did not hand over to me your most charming present until you had cashed his Excellency's check. Oh, the affair is beautifully simple. They will register your seven years' contract at your English Foreign Office in London, and I shall have done my duty to his Majesty the Shah, for you actually do know all about the assaying of metals ; and were I not the honest man I am, and a faithful servant of his Majesty the Shah, I might have filled in the name of the first person who was ready to—well, satisfy my just demands.'

"I was out of employment, I was of an adventurous disposition ; I closed with the secretary's rather ignominious proposition : he handed me a check for a hundred pounds, and, to my intense astonishment, it was honoured. And next day, with my official appointment

in my pocket, duly attested at our Foreign Office, I was presented to the Darogh-u-Molk, the Persian Ambassador in London. I found him to be a dear old gentleman, and when he held out his hand to me, intending that I should kiss it, I shook it warmly. He didn't take offence, he only laughed and made a remark in Persian to the secretary, which the latter translated as an assurance that 'my footsteps were bound to be fortunate.' I flattered myself that I had done nothing dishonest, and before I left the Embassy, Jumbaz Khan, the polite secretary, accepted my watch and chain with a thousand protestations of his gratitude.

"I left London for Persia, and after a long but uneventful journey of three months, *via* Constantinople, Trebizond, and Asia Minor, I arrived in Teheran a full-blown Government official of nine months' service, with ten golden sovereigns in my pocket, and three months' pay due to me. I was immediately installed in the quarters of my predecessor, who had fled from Persia some twelve months previously; and the Master of the Mint, my immediate official chief, recommended me to take over the household goods of the Frenchman, which he had seized upon at that gentleman's departure as one of his official duties. 'You can pay for them by instal-

ments, you know,' he said, as he handed me the three months' salary due to me, as a great favour, after deducting ten per cent. My quarters were within the walls of the Mint, which was a huge rambling place built like a fortress, within the Citadel, close to the Royal Palace. The coining operations were carried on in the most primitive manner. Little circular ingots of gold or silver were cast, laid upon a rude die, and then struck with a sledge-hammer, on the face of which was engraved the reverse of the coin. If the hammer happened to strike the centre of the ingot, a rude but perfect coin was the result; if it didn't, more or less of the reverse of the coin was simply a plain surface; if the blow was a trifle too hard, the coin was surrounded by a series of cracks, and little portions of the metal became detached—these were the perquisite of the Master of the Mint. This method of coinage was exactly the same as that practised in the early days of ancient Greece. My duties were of the very lightest description. I was solemnly presented with a very large seal of silver, on which was engraved my name and qualities: 'John Methuen Beg, Principal Assayer in the Royal Mint of his Majesty Nussir-u-deen Shah, Asylum of the Universe and King of Kings.' As to my office hours, they did not exist.

I wandered about the Mint at my own sweet will and pleasure, and I found myself the principal official there; for the Master of the Mint, Kelb Ali Khan, very seldom indeed put in an appearance. Everybody in the Mint used to make me a low obeisance whenever I showed myself, and finding time hang very heavy upon my hands, I began to study the language under the tutelage of a ragged young *mirza*¹ who spoke a little French. In six months I could read and write, and speak badly but fluently."

It was with considerable pride that I now informed my father of my Persian studies; he was delighted.

"You have been lucky, Madge," he said; "you've got a grammar and a vocabulary, and you've learned systematically. I had to pick it up by rule of thumb; my first tutor was a native of Hamadan, my second a Shirazi, my third an Armenian; I picked up the peculiarities of each of them, and though I speak Persian fluently enough now, yet I do it as a foreigner who speaks English with a Cockney-Irish pronunciation, with a dash of broad Scotch—that comes of *picking up* a language, my dear, without studying the grammar. But for you it will be all plain sailing; all you have to do is to

¹ *Mirza*, a person who can read and write; also a title equivalent to our Mr.

increase your vocabulary, and Nanna Rejab will see to that, for the old woman never leaves off talking, and in a few months you'll be counting in Persian and dreaming in Persian, and one doesn't do that till one has mastered a language—though you may master a language without speaking it intelligibly. Persian literature, particularly old Persian literature, is an altogether different language to the colloquial of the present day. One of the great pundits of the East India Company stayed with me in Shiraz a year or two ago; when he got thirsty he used to address my tableman as cupbearer, and direct him 'to wreath high a goblet of the glorious amber weepings of the vine.' Of course the poor fellow didn't know what he meant; just as well might a Persian address a London waiter in the language of Chaucer. As soon as I had learned to write, I made a rather unpleasant discovery,—I found out that I had been committing high treason once a-week, without knowing it. Now the punishments in Persia for high treason are very severe: the culprits are blown from guns, or shot up in the air from mortars, and one venerable politician was recently boiled alive in Shiraz where I am now living, and the only favour his great age and high rank could obtain for him was, that boiling water might be used

instead of cold. I am not exaggerating, and in this country it is very easy to commit high treason. If a thief steals my property it's theft; but if he steals anything belonging to the king, or any of his near relations, it is high treason, and is punished accordingly. Without knowing it I had been conspiring to debase the coinage ever since I had been in the country.

"Once a-week I used to attend at the private house of Kelb Ali Khan, the Master of the Mint: he was a particularly polite and kind nobleman, and my official chief, and he invariably insisted on my breakfasting with him. 'Just seal these,' he would say to me when I was taking my leave; and then he would produce half-a-dozen beautifully written documents, and I would take my great silver seal and rub a little Indian ink upon it, then I would moisten the bottom of the sheet of paper, and seal, that is to say, sign it: nobody signs his name in Persia—he affixes his seal. Till now these weekly sealings had been my only official duties. As luck would have it, on the last of these occasions I had forgotten to bring my seal with me. I apologised for my inadvertence to Kelb Ali Khan, and he good-humouredly excused me, telling me to take the papers home with me, seal them, and return them under cover

to him in the course of the afternoon. When I reached my house in the Mint, curiosity impelled me to attempt to read one of these official documents. I found that it ran as follows :—

“‘To His Highness the Lord High Treasurer.’

“Then followed a long string of compliments, principally in Arabic, which I found some difficulty in making out; then came the *mutlub*, or pith, of the paper, which turned out to be a certificate.

“‘I, the undersigned, hereby certify, that in the service of his Majesty the Shah, King of Kings and Asylum of the Universe, there have been coined at his Majesty’s Royal Mint, during the past seven days—

Gold *tomans* (so many, giving the number);

Silver *kerans* (ditto);

Silver half-*kerans* (ditto);

Silver quarter-*kerans* (ditto).

And I certify that I, the undersigned, have carefully assayed the gold and silver ingots, and found them to be pure gold and pure silver, and that after coinage I assayed the gold coin and found them to be pure; that I also assayed the silver coins and found them to contain only the requisite proportion of copper alloy, in witness whereof I have affixed my official seal.’

"I was considerably alarmed when I had finished reading the document. I left my room, and I obtained specimens of the freshly coined money; I found, on assaying it, that the gold coins were nearly absolutely pure, but that the silver ones were adulterated with copper to an extent many times exceeding the amount of alloy we were supposed to use. I hastened to the house of the Master of the Mint; I was told that he was asleep, and couldn't possibly be disturbed; and I handed back the unsigned certificates in an envelope, without a word, to one of his secretaries who happened to be in attendance. I then returned to my quarters to await results. It was sunset when I was hastily summoned to Kelb Ali Khan's presence; he was in his *khulwut*, which was the private apartment where he transacted his most important business. It was a little room, totally devoid of furniture save a tiny writing-table eight inches high; the Master of the Mint was squatted in a corner of the room upon the thick felt carpet which formed the covering of the floor. He smiled pleasantly as his servant raised the silk curtain and I entered the room.

"'Be seated, Methuen Beg,' he said, with great politeness; 'what a careless, hare-brained fellow you are! you come here in the morning without your seal, and then

you send these papers back to me just as you got them, and you don't seem provided with an excuse, as you would be if you were a Persian, and you've got a face as long as my arm, not at all the sort of face a man should wear in the presence of his official chief. Come,' he added, sharply, 'seal the papers at once, and be off about your business.'

"'I don't see how I'm to do that, your Excellency,' I said. 'I have read the papers; how then can I sign them?'

"'You have read them!' he cried, in great astonishment. 'Why, they are written in Persian; man, how can you have read them? Who read them to you?' he added, in a lower tone. 'Let me know the rascal's name at once, that he may be punished as he deserves.'

"I assured him that no eye but mine had seen the documents; he seemed considerably pleased at this.

"'I am glad you are honest, Methuen Beg,' he said, wearily; 'I had feared that my enemies had got hold of you, and had bribed you to refuse your signature. Affix it at once, my good fellow—it's only a matter of form.'

"'I cannot do that, Excellency,' I replied. 'During the afternoon I assayed some of the coins.'

“‘*Jehannum*!’¹ cried Kelb Ali Khan, ‘you’ve been guilty of an act of gross impertinence, a most unpardonable curiosity. Who told you to assay the coins? Am I the Master of the Mint or not? And whose dog are you, let me ask, that you presume to bark in my presence?’

“‘May it please your Excellency,’ I replied, ‘you assuredly are the Master of the Mint, but we are both servants of his Majesty, the Asylum of the Universe; and surely an assayer is bound to assay. The amount of alloy——’

“‘Don’t talk nonsense,’ said Kelb Ali Khan, in a low voice; ‘walls have ears,’ he added. ‘Can’t you understand why we have a foreigner as assayer at the Mint?’ he went on, speaking in a whisper.

“I shook my head.

“‘Then I’ll explain it to you, man of no understanding,’ he said. ‘If his Majesty’s coin be debased, I am personally responsible, but I can hardly be expected to go round and test each separate coin, therefore I rely upon you to perform the necessary assays and to certify that it has been done, whereupon my hands become clean,’ he said, ‘and my face is duly whitened; you now become

¹ *Jehannum* = Hell.

responsible, but you cannot be punished with impunity because you are a foreigner ; besides, you can plead that you signed the certificates as a matter of form. You would be probably dismissed ; but as the Persian Government has to pay you your salary for seven years, you would be immediately given an appointment in some other department. So you see you run no risk ; seal the papers like a good fellow, and let me strongly recommend you in future not to take the trouble to read what you are called upon to sign. Why, if I were only lucky enough to be a foreigner, there's nothing I wouldn't affix my seal to. You are my servant, under my patronage and my protection ; I shall see to your advancement, and at my very next interview with his Majesty, I shall ask him, as a personal favour, to confer upon you the decoration of the Order of the Lion and Sun, of the fifth class : think of that, Methuen Beg, and let your head touch the heavens. Well, where's your seal ? ' cried Kelb Ali Khan, briskly.

" But I was not to be persuaded. I was very much frightened ; the prospect of being boiled alive or blown from a gun was not an alluring one, and I had as yet received only three months' pay in the country. I pointed out these facts to Kelb Ali Khan. Then he tried to frighten me.

“‘Do you know, O man,’ he said, ‘that you are personally responsible for all the irregularities that have taken place in the Mint during your tenure of office?’

“‘If what your Excellency says be true,’ I replied, ‘that, as a foreigner, I’m above punishment, that will not much matter to me.’

“‘There’s something in that,’ said Kelb Ali Khan, with a chuckle. ‘Let’s come to business. What will you take for signing the papers? Now don’t open your mouth too wide, shall we say five *tomans*? Is that sufficient to lull your susceptibilities?’

“It was now my turn to become indignant, and I rose to go. •

“‘Sit down,’ said the Khan, ‘sit down; don’t lose your temper, let us say ten *tomans*, *in gold*,’ he added, meaningly.

“But I declined quietly but firmly, for I saw that my official chief did not intend to insult me; he evidently looked upon the transaction as an ordinary matter of business, and he could by no means understand my scruples.

“‘Methuen Beg, you’re a pig-headed fool,’ he said, with a smile. ‘I am sorry for you, for you will never get on in the service of his Majesty the Shah. By

receiving ten *tomans*, in gold, from me every week, you would more than double your salary. Go home and think it over. Good night, you are dismissed.'

"I made him a low bow and returned to my quarters in the Mint, having considerable food for reflection, and fully determined to make the English Ambassador at Teheran acquainted with the whole matter the next day."

It was now two hours after sunset, and Nanna Rejab came to announce to us that dinner was served. I shall not describe this meal, which was merely a repetition of the breakfast upon a larger scale. We dined upon the flat roof of the house, in the open air, and the old woman waited upon us. There was a big travelling carpet spread in a corner under a wall, where we could not be overlooked, and we did without chairs and tables, squatting upon it, and attacking the meal with our fingers. My father explained to me the arts of thrusting the rice into my mouth without spilling the grains, of dipping my bread into the various sauces and gravies so as to obviate the use of a spoon, and of making a flap of bread serve as a plate. "It is easy enough, my dear," he said, "when you are used

to it," as he laughed over my various mishaps, indiscretions, and breaches of etiquette.

As soon as dinner was over, my father called for a *kalian*; then he said his prayers while the dinner equipage was being removed, combing his beard with great solemnity during the process, and bowing and prostrating himself with an agility that astonished me. Then our bedding was laid out at opposite ends of the carpet, and, without divesting ourselves of our clothes, and each drawing a quilted cotton coverlet over our shoulders, we went to sleep in the open air. I was too tired to be astonished.

CHAPTER VI.

I GO UP COUNTRY.

THE sun woke me in the morning, and the first thing I perceived, when I opened my eyes, was Nanna Rejab and her checkered cotton veil: before I could fling the coverlet off, the old woman, who evidently looked upon herself as my duenna, was ready with a great sheet of figured muslin, which she immediately flung over my head, lest any profane male eye might catch a glimpse of my face. She marched me from the flat roof into my little room, and nothing was visible except my bare ankles and my ridiculous little kid shoes with the high red heels, for I was hidden by a great mountain of moving muslin. Then the old woman suggested that I should take off some of the finery of the day before; the yellow satin skirt, the velvet jacket, and the natty little skull-cap and the outer pink head-kerchief of silk

embroidered in gold I discarded, somewhat unwillingly, for similar garments of plainer materials. "Evidently," I thought, "the one was evening dress, while their successors, which were merely cheap cotton prints of flaring colours, are the morning costume of Persian ladies. But I was wrong; for I found that, as my father, who now appeared, told me, I was in travelling costume.

"You'll find it very rough work, Madge," he said. "We have ten days' marching before us, and some of the mountain-passes we shall have to climb are very like crossing the Alps, and we shall have to do our five-and-twenty to thirty miles a-day."

My spirits sank very low indeed at this terrible announcement. "Oh papa," I said, "I don't think I could walk five-and-twenty miles."

He only laughed. "You won't walk, my dear," he said; "you'll ride."

But the terrors of riding were, to my mind, even greater than those of walking. "I have never ridden a horse in my life, papa," I said. "I never got further than a donkey."

He only laughed all the more. "You'll travel up-country, Madge," he said, "as a half mule-load; you'll go up in a sort of box," he went on, evidently enjoying

my discomfiture. "A woman in the East, unless she rides in a horse-litter, a mode of conveyance only affected by ladies of the highest rank, always travels in this way. You won't have to walk; you will merely have to sit still and endure, and I am afraid you will find it tiring enough. However, you will be well provisioned, and at all events you won't die of hunger or thirst."

We breakfasted about noon, and then our preparations for departure commenced in earnest. Nanna Rejab now brought me a pair of coarse green canvas garments which puzzled me altogether; each of these things resembled nothing so much as a gigantic bolster-case open at one end, while the other end terminated in a sort of stocking-foot of the same material as the bolster-case. I was instructed to thrust my foot into one of these extraordinary arrangements, when the stocking-foot became a sort of tightly fitting outer boot; then I put on the other foot covering; then I stood up and distributed my "divided skirts" between the two bolster-cases, and my skirts were exceedingly voluminous, though terribly short; then I tucked the ends of the bolster-cases into my waist-band, when my appearance became sufficiently comic, for the bolster-cases were transformed into a

great pair of the baggiest of baggy breeches—in fact, my lower extremities appeared to have become changed into bolsters with feet. Then the old woman gave me a pair of green shagreen slippers, similar to those worn by Bluebeard in the picture-books: the heels of these were shod with iron; they were several sizes too short for me, but it was possible to walk in them—just possible, and no more. Then I donned the great blue outer envelope of the day before, slipped on the white cotton veil and the white cotton gloves, and then, by my father's directions, I sat down upon one of my boxes and awaited events, Nanna Rejab, in a much-worn costume similar to my own, mounting guard over me. Then three or four ferocious-looking men—whose legs were bare save for leathern gaiters, and who seemed to wear a sort of kilt of blue cotton, and each of whom had a broad belt from which hung a great piece of polished iron chain, and into which were stuck a long knife, a dagger, a scourge-like whip, and a Turkish *chibouque* with a great red clay or metal head—entered the room, apparently for the purpose of pillaging the place. One seized the rolled-up bedding and ran away with it; another rolled up the carpet, popped it under his arm, and taking up one of my boxes as if it had been a

featherweight, disappeared. They were all shouting and laughing, and they all seemed in great good-humour. They were strong, hulking, bearded men, burnt to a deep brown by exposure, and their muscles stood out like knotted cordage upon their bare arms and legs; most ferocious-looking bandits they seemed to my astonished eyes, but they were in reality only honest and peaceful muleteers. One man tapped the box that I was sitting on, in an apologetic manner. I rose, he shouldered it, and left the room without a word. I was somewhat reassured when my father came in armed to the teeth; he indeed looked a ruffian of the deepest dye. A gun was slung over his back; two big silver-mounted pistols were thrust into his shawl girdle, while a sort of straight sword, two feet long, with a blade two inches broad, hung at his side; a pair of heavy jack-boots, and a huge silk handkerchief of many-coloured stripes, which was bound to his head by a circular fillet of horse-hair, and which hung down his back picturesquely, and a pair of black goggles, completed his startling costume. Even his big black beard looked bigger and blacker, and his moustache seemed to turn up naturally.

"Don't let my warlike appearance alarm you, Madge,"

he said. "It is the custom in this country to go well armed when one is travelling; but the roads are quiet enough just now, and there is absolutely no fear of robbers. The mules will be loaded in a minute or two, and I will see you safely into your *kajawa*;¹ you'll have to try and sit as much like a tailor as possible, and mind not to uncover your face until we get outside the city. Though you may not see me for the next hour or two, I shall be close beside you, and Nanna Rejab will share your mule."

I looked out from the now open window at the great town of mud hovels, and at the sparkling blue sea beyond; I heard the distant sound of a gun, I saw a little puff of white smoke, and then the paddles of the Ganges, which had been my happy home for so many weeks, began to revolve slowly, and the great steamer got under way. "Good-bye to civilisation," I thought, and I felt inclined to cry behind my veil.

"*Bismillah, Khanūm kucheck!*" ("In the name of God, little lady!"), said Nanna Rejab, seizing my hand.

I clung tightly to the old woman, and we scrambled down the steep stairs together. The loaded mules were just moving off, and I tottered along (for my shoes

¹ *Kajawa*, the mule pannier in which women travel in Persia.

would persist in coming off) at the old woman's side, behind them. We turned down a narrow lane into an open piece of ground, and at the end of the lane stood a particularly tall mule, upon whose back, high in air, were slung what looked like a pair of dog-kennels covered with scarlet cloth trimmed with white braid; to the front of each was attached by a leathern thong a great yellow earthen water-bottle of thick porous clay. Rejab, the ragged man-servant, seized upon his mother and bundled her into one of the dog-kennels with scant ceremony. "Hold tight, little woman," said my father, as he gently raised me in his strong arms, and carefully packed me into the other; then the red cloth curtain fell, and I found myself in total darkness. "Good-bye for the present, Madge," cried my father from without; "hold tight, you'll soon get used to it; you're quite safe, and you can't fall out."

I was half-blinded by my veil, and at that moment the mule moved off, and my prison began to roll alarmingly. I found myself wedged in by cushions and pillows; it was quite certain that I should not fall out, for it was almost impossible to move. But I managed to raise my veil, and then I found that we

were the last of a procession of laden mules, marching steadily through what appeared to be a market-place; and I felt somewhat relieved to see from behind the flapping cloth curtain that Rejab, who, like my father, was armed to the teeth, was leading the mule. We soon arrived at a huge mud doorway, at which stood a sentinel in rags; this was evidently one of the city gates. Then I saw my father ride past us, mounted on a great white Arab horse, who neighed, pranced, and caracolled, just as some circus-horses do, in the most alarming and warlike manner. The sentry saluted my father, and we passed under the gateway into a howling wilderness, a sandy desert, in which there was no sign of life or vegetation, and which looked white, glaring, and inhospitable in the fierce rays of the hot sun.

I began to feel sick,—not home-sick or heart-sick, but I experienced a dreadful feeling like an exaggerated sea-sickness, caused by the rolling motion imparted to the *kajawa* by the movement of the mule; it was very bad indeed at first, but it soon passed off. Then I took off my veil, and I tied down one corner of the flapping curtain, which was provided with a string for that purpose, thus keeping my moving prison-house

cool, shutting out the sun, and obtaining a view of the sandy salt marsh through which we were now passing. The mule was now no longer led, but that was needless as he followed his companions in the most orderly manner, and the faithful Rejab stalked along at his side, munching his breakfast, which consisted of a loaf of bread and a raw onion. The continuous jangling of bells, which had gone on ever since we started, was now explained. Each mule was provided with several of these, and at each step of the beast that carried me there was a not unmusical clash of melody. I found that underneath the gay cloth cover of my *kajawa* were several folds of thick felt, which effectually protected me from the strong sun; to the framework of the hooded box, for a *kajawa* is nothing more, were hung several little bags of gaily-coloured chintz; I examined their contents. Three of them had varied assortments of mixed sweetmeats; there was a bag of walnuts, another of oranges, while a third contained sweet biscuits made of rice-flour. Just then something began to tug at the inner side of the cloth cover, and presently a dark-brown hand appeared holding a pomegranate. I recognised it at once as that of Nanna Rejab, and raising the curtain, I could see

the old woman two feet off, curled up, as I was, in her *kajawa*. She was laughing reassuringly, and began to suck away at another pomegranate. I found that she had already cut a hole in the one she presented to me, and I was not slow to follow her example. Oh, that pomegranate! it was the first one I had ever tasted; it was a revelation to me, for I was hot and thirsty, and the delicious sweet sub-acid flavour of the cool luscious juice was delightfully refreshing. When I had finished the pomegranate, I threw it overboard,—it is the only expression. Then I lay on my soft cushions, for I had succeeded in making myself comfortable by this time, contentedly looking out from my moving nest upon the melancholy and monotonous panorama which was slowly unfolded before my wondering eyes. And this was Persia! not a tree, not a house, not a living soul to be seen, except those composing our little caravan; sand, sloppy salt mud, here and there a few sparse patches of brushwood or reeds; road there was none, but the track was plainly indicated by innumerable foot and hoof marks in the mud and sand. And then, when the ground rose a little, which it did ever and anon, one saw nothing but the clear cloudless sky of deep turquoise blue.

"Are you all right, Madge?" said my father, as he rode up to the side of the *kajawa*.

"All right, and quite happy, papa," I cried; and I was quite happy: it was all new and strange and delightful to me.

"Then I should try to go to sleep, if I were you, little woman, for you have seven hours more of it," he said, and then he cantered away.

And in a few minutes I dropped off, and was soon sleeping the dreamless sleep of a tired child. The gentle rocking motion of the moving mule, and the semi-obscurity, for I had loosened the flapping curtain and had closed the entrance of the *kajawa*, caused me to sleep on till close upon sunset: then I was awakened by a sudden jolt—my mule had stopped, as indeed had all the others. I could see the muleteers already beginning to unload their beasts; as soon as they had done this, the animals galloped off, amusing themselves by rolling in the loose sand. My father picketed his horse to great iron pegs which Rejab had driven into the ground, while a black boy began to spread a carpet; then my father came and extracted me from the *kajawa*, and at the same moment Nanna Rejab jumped out of hers with wonderful agility: both passengers always have to get

out at once, for unless this is done, the weight of the traveller who remains overbalances the arrangement, the *kajawa* gets between the legs of the mule, and she runs a very fair chance of being kicked to death by the frightened animal. I was dreadfully stiff when my father deposited me upon the ground, in fact I could hardly walk at first, and I was very glad indeed to recline upon the carpet, while the old woman chafed my tired limbs: all Persians are adepts at this shampooing, which they cultivate as an art; it is so great a luxury that one soon finds it almost impossible to do without it. Our boxes lay about in every direction, just as they had been unloaded from the mules; the muleteers lighted a small fire, and I could see the black boy busily engaged over it with a number of strangely-shaped cooking utensils. Presently Rejab appeared with a great brass *samovar* or urn, which was soon hissing merrily.

"Pull down your veil, my child," cried my father, hurriedly, on his approach.

Of course I did as I was bid, and I have no doubt that Rejab thought me a most decorous young person. The old woman, who didn't seem in the least tired, now prepared the tea, and the muleteers secured their beasts

to a twenty-foot piece of rope of black goats' hair which they had pegged to the ground; the great pack-saddles were removed, each animal was carefully currycombed, which process the vicious brutes violently resented by kicking, squealing, and biting. Then the pack-saddle was replaced, each mule was supplied with a big nose-bag which contained cut straw and a double handful of barley; and then all was quiet save for the jangling of the mule-bells.

"We shall camp here," said my father, "till an hour after midnight, when we shall resume our march."

"But it will be quite dark, papa," I cried, in astonishment.

"Not a bit of it, my dear," he replied; "the moon will be well up then, and it will be easy enough to travel upon this level plain: both mules and muleteers can see like cats, and we shall do the greater portion of our journey at night, to avoid the heat of the sun."

"But is there no danger from wild animals?" I exclaimed, apprehensively.

"Well," said my father, with a laugh, "there is one place some five stages farther on where one sees an occasional lion; but as the Persian lion always runs away at the approach of man, that needn't trouble you;

though there is a great deal of game in the south of Persia, there are very few beasts of prey: there are plenty of jackals, of course, you will hear them as the night draws in, but it is difficult even to get a glimpse of one, they are so very timid. I have once seen a panther, who immediately scuttled off when I threw a stone at him. You are absolutely safe at this time of year; in some places farther north, in the depth of winter, the villagers lose an occasional sheep through the depredations of wolves and hyenas. There is nothing more terrible than that."

"And are there no robbers, papa?" I said.

"Enough and to spare, Madge, when the country is disturbed, but just now it is perfectly quiet."

Then he announced to me that dinner would be ready in a few hours, and, to beguile the time, I persuaded him to resume the narrative he had commenced the previous evening.

MY FATHER'S HISTORY CONTINUED.

"Before I could put my intention of laying my case before the English Minister into effect, I was summoned to the presence of Kelb Ali Khan, who had arrived at the Mint at an unusually early hour. I found all the

officials collected in my chief's great room; to a man they were particularly enthusiastic and friendly towards me. Kelb Ali Khan himself was all smiles.

“‘Methuen Beg,’ he said, motioning me to a seat on his right hand, ‘I am delighted to be able to announce to you your good fortune. The Itizad-u-Sultaneh,¹ the Minister of Sciences, whose unworthy son-in-law I have the honour to be, has determined that your great talent shall be no longer wasted in the subordinate post which you now occupy. My father-in-law is a great philosopher; a very learned man: he has discovered secrets that have baffled the sages of the East and West; he is the greatest alchemist that Persia has produced in modern times; he has effected the transmutation of metals, and has succeeded in manufacturing precious stones from ordinary window-glass. Notwithstanding my repeated protestations, he insists on depriving me of your valuable services. Methuen Beg,’ he added, with a smile, clapping me on the back in a good-natured way, ‘you are appointed Professor of Chemistry in the Royal College of Teheran.’

“Then he got up and left the room; my brother Mint officials crowded round me and offered me their

¹ A title. *Lit.*, The Support of the State.

congratulations, some of them even insisted on kissing me upon the cheek. The chief accountant informed me that he had orders to pay my salary up to date, without deduction of any kind.

“‘You are indeed the happiest of Mint officials, the most fortunate of chemists,’ he added, somewhat grimly. ‘The Master of the Mint is himself desirous of presenting you to your new patron, and requests that you will prepare to accompany him to the palace of the Itizad immediately.’ He produced a little bag of gold coins, and paid the whole of the salary due to me then and there.

“I accompanied Kelb Ali Khan, who was exceedingly friendly, to the palace of the Minister of Sciences. The Itizad-u-Sultaneh was an aged and wealthy nobleman, a near relative of, and a prime favourite with, the Shah: his house was magnificent in the extreme; there were crowds of gaily-dressed servants, dependants, and hangers-on, lounging, bustling about, or whispering to each other in the beautiful courtyard of his *berūni* or public apartments. The tiled paths were clean, and carefully damped in order to cool the air; the water in the great *hauz*, or stone-edged raised pond, which occupied the centre of the garden, was clear as crystal:

on it floated a toy steamboat, and in its centre was a single lofty *jet d'eau* which played to a height of twelve feet. The sunken flower-beds were crowded with the narcissus in full bloom, giving forth a heavy and delicious perfume; there were rows of orange trees occupying the centre of these beds, covered with fragrant buds, while on each tree were left some dozen golden globes of last year's fruit. In a corner of the *hauz*, half in and half out of the water, lay a great bundle of willow-wands, in order that they might be tough and supple, should their owner feel inclined to administer the bastinado. From the trees depended numerous gilt cages, each containing a parrot, or a nightingale singing merrily. The external walls of the place, which were of plaster of Paris white as snow, and ornamented with florid decorations in high and low relief, gave one the idea of white marble; the doors and windows were of polished walnut, cedar, or mahogany, the latter made gay by a profusion of tiny panes of glass, of all the colours of the rainbow. Even the huge projecting eaves of the roof were beautifully ornamented, being richly gilt, and then decorated by paintings of impossible flowers and fruit, and birds of gorgeous plumage. As I followed Kelb Ali Khan, every one made way for us to pass, bowing low to the Master

of the Mint, who, as I have said, was the son-in-law of the wealthy owner of this beautiful place. We ascended six broad steps of semi-transparent pale-green Yezd marble, and entered a small outer hall paved with the same material, which gave one the idea of great slabs of Chinese jade; then a silken curtain was raised by the attendants, we put off our shoes, and came at once into the presence of the Minister himself. After we had made our salaams, the Master of the Mint formally introduced me.

“‘This, may it please your Royal Highness, is Methuen Beg, the Englishman, the faithful servant of his Majesty the Shah. He comes to thank you for the signal favour you have conferred upon him in appointing him to the office of Professor of Chemistry in the Royal College, a post for which he is peculiarly fitted and which he is certain to adorn. He is well versed in all the secret arts and devices of the Europeans; Hippocrates was a fool to him, Galen was not worthy to be his disciple, for he has more learning in the tip of his little finger than Aflatoon¹ and Abū Senna² rolled into one. He has expressed to me privately his great delight at being permitted to sit beneath the shade of the greatest

¹ Aflatoon = Plato.

² Abū Senna = Avicenna.

philosopher and man of science that Iran has ever produced, in ancient or modern times; and he has assured me that he would gladly forego all mere pecuniary advantage if he might be permitted to sit in the portico of the Temple of Knowledge, which is presided over by the wisest of noblemen, the greatest philosopher, and the brightest Light of Science of this age or of any other.'

" 'Good, very good,' grumbled out the old prince, who sat in the upper corner of the room, muffled up in an ample cloak of Cashmere shawl lined with priceless sables. 'Every word that you have uttered is the truth, Kelb Ali Khan; but is the unbeliever well versed in the science of alchemy? Has he made progress towards the discovery of the Philosopher's Stone? Has he passed his nights in the pursuit of astrology, and has he made any advance in the search for the Elixir of Life? Is he an adept in black and white magic, and has he carefully studied the works of Hermes, Aristotle, and Paracelsus, and is he well skilled in divination and in the interpretation of dreams?'

" 'I will answer for him in all these things,' said Kelb Ali Khan, airily. 'I have reason to believe,' he added mysteriously, 'that he is capable of raising

the devil, and that many of the secret arts of Suleiman ibn Daoud¹ are familiar to him.'

"'Let him answer for himself,' said the Itizad-u-Sultaneh, drily. 'Speak, Methuen Beg. You have my permission to speak freely.'

"'May it please your Royal Highness,' I said, in a very low voice, 'his Excellency the Khan has greatly overrated my humble powers; but if your Royal Highness should permit me to take a subordinate part in the labours which are so familiar to all the scientific men of Europe, I shall look upon myself as the luckiest of men, and the most fortunate of chemists.'

"'Good,' cried the Itizad; 'I like your blunt manner. You speak the language of truth; your desire shall be granted to you. From this moment you are in my service. You will see,' he said, turning to his steward, who stood awaiting orders in the courtyard below—'you will see, Hajji² Nazir,³ that my European chemist receives a dress of honour of the value of ten *tomans*, and a month's pay in advance.'

¹ Solomon, the son of David, looked upon throughout the East as the Prince of Magicians.

² *Hajji* = One who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

³ *Nazir* = a steward.

"The man bowed low. 'On my eyes, on my eyes,' he replied.

"'There is one thing, Methuen Beg,' said the Itizad, 'that I must insist upon; you must don the garments of civilisation: the dress you wear is highly indecent, and gives you the air of a tailless monkey of unprepossessing appearance. The robes of a sage should be long and flowing; you must never again enter my presence in that disgraceful costume. Let him have two complete changes of raiment befitting his condition,' he added, addressing the steward; 'let him have proper quarters assigned to him close to the laboratory. You are dismissed,' he continued to me, and then he yawned wearily, exhibiting a double row of gums without a tooth in them.

"I retired discreetly, backing out of the room; and as I did so I took in at a glance the extraordinary chamber in which I had been received, and I comprehended now the reason for the perpetual ticking and striking which had gone on during the whole of my interview with the Itizad. The place was well known throughout Teheran as the Hall of the Thousand and One Miracles. Upon the walls, in the numerous recesses, and upon the floor, stood clocks and

mechanical toys of every sort, size, and description; the greater portion of the clocks were going, and it was the practice of the old man to wind them all up himself every day. From the elaborately decorated roof hung numerous chandeliers of coloured glass, no two of which were alike. There were three pianos, innumerable musical boxes, a big barrel-organ, and several strange-looking machines, being working models evidently imported from Europe. As soon as we got into the courtyard, I thanked my former official chief most warmly for his disinterested kindness in obtaining for me the Chemical Lectureship at the Royal College.

“‘It was the only way I could think of getting rid of you without a scandal,’ he said. ‘It is really your own pig-headed obstinacy that has got you the berth,’ he added, with a laugh; ‘still you ought to be very grateful to me all the same. If you play your cards well you are bound to get into the good graces of my father-in-law, and when you do, don’t forget to sing my praises as the most honest and disinterested of mankind. I have reasons for wishing you to particularly insist on my honesty.’ .

“‘I shall always speak well of you, Kelb Ali

Khan,' I said. 'I only hope that I shall be able to fill the post of Lecturer on Chemistry at the Royal College'—how sweet my high-sounding title seemed to me as it rolled off my tongue — 'to his Royal Highness's satisfaction.'

"'That needn't trouble you,' said the Master of the Mint, with a chuckle; 'there are no students as yet,—there isn't even a College, except on paper; but there are the revenues, which are administered by my father-in-law,—the Itizad, they are his *modakel* or perquisite; the Professor of Anatomy is his chief cook, and many of his servants draw pay as lecturers on something or other. He requires your services to help him to discover the Philosopher's Stone: what a man can want with the Philosopher's Stone when he is one of the richest men in Persia I don't understand,' he added; and then he handed me over to the Itizad's steward, who hospitably entertained me at breakfast in his handsome house, provided me with two complete suits of the kind worn by learned men, and made the payment which the Itizad had commanded.

"'If you are desirous of pleasing our master,' said the Nazir, 'you will change your clothes at once;

the garments of a European will, as you have probably found out by this time, only subject you to annoyance and ridicule: besides, our easy-fitting flowing robes are suited to the country and the climate. When you have been a little longer in Persia, you will probably adopt our religion as well as our garments, and then you will marry and we shall make a man of you.'

"Rather unwillingly I took the steward's advice. I certainly looked a much more dignified personage when I had effected the change, and oh, how much more comfortable was the common-sense costume of Persia. The Nazir was delighted with my appearance, and duly congratulated me.

" 'Methuen Beg,' he said, 'you look a very Rüstam.¹ *Mashallah!* you're a fine man. Should you succeed in catching the Shah's eye, he'll put you into his bodyguard, and then you'll be a made man; why, you may become a full colonel in a year.'

" 'I don't think I should care for fighting, Hajji Nazir,' I said.

" 'Oh, the bodyguard don't fight,' he replied; 'they only accompany the King on his hunting expeditions.

¹ Rüstam is the Persian Hercules.

Are you fond of brandy?' said the Nazir to me in a low whisper.

"I had to acknowledge that I didn't care for brandy, but that I had no objection to a glass of wine if I could get it.

" 'I have one of the finest cellars in Teheran,' said the Nazir; 'every year the European who is Medical Inspector-General of Hospitals and Fleets, and who lives at Shiraz, sends a couple of loads of the finest Shiraz wine to the Itizad, my master.'

" 'I didn't know that Persia had a fleet,' I said, 'and this is the first I hear of a hospital.'

" 'Well, but we are going to have hospitals and fleets; and the Lord of the Seas (what you would call the Lord High Admiral) is a very high official; I believe he farms the custom-houses in the south of Persia, and of course he will command the fleet as soon as it is built: anyhow, he draws the pay, which, as you will allow, is the principal thing. But to return to the wine,' he went on, familiarly poking me in the ribs, and bursting into a loud laugh, 'it invariably gets broken in transit—every bottle of it,' he added, with a knowing wink. 'I must have at least a hundred bottles of it left down below. Ah, Methuen Beg, let us become cup-companions,

and swear eternal friendship: you don't care for brandy, I don't care for wine. Make yourself at home; breakfast and dine with me as often as you like; what more natural that, as brother professors, we should be close friends.'

" 'And are you, too, a professor?' I cried, in astonishment.

" 'Of course I am,' said the Nazir. 'I am two; till this morning I was three. I am Professor both of Political Economy and of Military Engineering; a couple of hours ago I was also Professor of Chemistry. It's an arrangement of my master's, you see, which enables him to draw the pay of all the offices which may happen to be vacant.'

"Then he conducted me to his *khelwut* or study, which was situated in a separate courtyard. From a cupboard in the wall he produced a bottle of brandy of the commonest description, and a small carboy containing what turned out to be most delicious Shiraz wine, which I soon found resembled a dry sherry of a superior kind. We drank out of little silver basins, each of which might have held half-a-pint. The Nazir became more jovial than ever; he made long quotations from the works of Hafiz in praise of the juice of the grape; then

he sang, accompanying himself on a sort of guitar, drinking raw brandy at intervals the whole time, and he wound up by flinging off all his clothes except his shirt and drawers, and performing a sort of bacchanalian dance; then he sat down on the floor opposite me, made a series of hideous grimaces, and fell prone. My cup-companion was dead-drunk. I sat by the window sipping the delicious Shiraz wine, and waiting for him to get sober: this he did in about a couple of hours' time.

“ ‘I have had the most delightful dreams, Methuen Beg,’ he said, with a smile. Then he put on his clothes, looked at his watch, washed his hands and face at the little tank in the centre of the courtyard, popped some cloves into his mouth, which he chewed to disguise the scent of the brandy—and he insisted on my doing the same thing; then, pulling himself together, he said in a melancholy tone, ‘We’ll go and have some tea, Methuen Beg, and then we’ll present ourselves before our august master.’

“ His Royal Highness the Itizad was graciously pleased to express his satisfaction at my change of attire, and he ordered me to attend him in the laboratory at five the next morning.”

"Your office hours were early enough now, papa," I said, with a smile.

"In this country, my dear," my father replied, "nobody looks upon it as a hardship to get up early: the morning is the coolest part of the day, you see, and very little real business is done after the noonday meal by the official classes. The Persians work till noon, and after that Jack's a gentleman and enjoys himself. I have had fifteen years' experience, Madge, and I have ceased to believe in all work and no play, and I think the Eastern way the better way. And after you have been a little while in this country, and have learned to love the delights of the cool early morning, you too will be up with the lark, and will agree that to have to lie a-bed is a very great hardship indeed. But you can't do better than turn in now, my child; you'll be able to sleep after my long yarn, and we have another seven hours' march to do before we reach the caravanserai at Borasjün, which is our first stage."

I stretched myself out upon the carpet, drew a cotton quilt over my shoulders, and lay for a while watching the myriads of stars, which seemed more numerous and to sparkle more brightly than with us in Europe; and then, lulled by the gentle tinkle of the distant mule-

bells, I forgot that I was sleeping upon the wayside in an Eastern desert, and began to dream that I was examining, with astonished admiration, the marvels of the Hall of the Thousand and One Miracles. At midnight my father woke me; a dinner of several courses was served: how the black boy had managed to cook it I could not tell, but it was a very capital dinner, and I was as hungry as a hunter. It seemed strange to be dining at midnight in the open air, by the dim light of a candle stuck into a sort of Chinese lantern, which hung suspended from a stick. While we dined the muleteers loaded their beasts, with many shouts and cries; then, the mule carrying the *kajawas* was brought to the edge of the carpet, the old woman and I were packed in, and off we went. The rolling movement, the darkness, the continuous pealing of the mule-bells, and, I suppose I must add, the heavy meal I had just swallowed, made me speedily drop off to sleep.

CHAPTER VII.

MY JOURNEY CONTINUED.

I WAS awakened by my father's dragging me out from the recesses of the *kajawa* into the blinding sunshine: we had come a distance of twenty-four miles in some seven hours, and I found myself rubbing my eyes in the courtyard of the great caravanserai of Borasjūn. The place was a huge square, each side of which contained some twenty deep arches; each arch had a small windowless apartment behind it, and was intended as a resting-place for a different party of travellers. Nanna Rejab and I took temporary possession of one of these arches which happened to be in the shade, and there we sat waiting, closely veiled, while another one was prepared for our reception. Rejab and the black boy were very busy indeed: each of them went to work with a will with a small hand-broom, and from the little inner apartment

at the back of the arch they had selected, they flung out what appeared to be the miscellaneous contents of a dust-bin; then they swept the inner apartment, sprinkled water in it, and swept it a second time, clouds of dust pouring out during the process; then the black boy lighted a candle-end, and appeared to be engaged in searching for hidden treasure in the inner room: he suddenly gave a loud shout, whipped out a small pair of tongs from his girdle, and then appeared in triumph in the outer arch, waving the tongs above his head, between the tips of which he held something of a pale-green colour, which wriggled violently; he exhibited it to my father and then to the old woman and me,—it was a scorpion some three inches long. He and Rejab then spread carpets both in the inner and outer apartments, and the muleteers, as they unloaded our boxes, hoisted them on to the platform of the archway, which was some three feet above the ground, and there built them into a barricade, leaving a hole in the middle for ingress. Meanwhile Rejab had unpacked the *samovar* and was employed in getting tea ready, while the black boy proceeded to light a fire of wood in the archway next to that chosen for our quarters. The muleteers drove their beasts off out of the sun to the great cool

stable built behind the living-rooms at the back of the caravanserai, which had standing room, as my father told me, for four hundred animals. My father's ragged groom walked the great white charger round and round the vast courtyard; while Nanna Rejab, absurd as it may seem, was fully occupied in mounting guard over me. Persian ladies consider themselves ill-treated if they are not jealously guarded. Some dozen of the cells or arches round the caravanserai were occupied, most of them by merchants, whose bales were piled up in the arch, while their owners slept in the apartment beyond. Several of the arches held little groups of tramps, whose property consisted of the clothes they stood up in and their big iron-headed sticks. Most of them seemed rather formidable-looking ruffians, but my father assured me that they were ordinary wayfarers, travelling together for mutual protection.

The caravanserai itself was built of hewn stone and was of the most solid construction, the walls being several feet in thickness, while the great wooden gates were of immense strength. I now accompanied my father and the old woman on to the lofty roof of the building, and we looked out over the low crenelated loopholed wall of the roof upon the surrounding plain.

The village of Borasjūn, with its few mud houses, was close to the caravanserai, and in every direction stretched fields of ripening corn, gardens, and vineyards, while towards the north lay the great mountain range which we should have to cross to reach the central plateau of Persia, on which Shiraz, our destination, was situated. The mountains seemed verdant, and I could see forests reaching almost to the summits of some of them, while in every direction on the surrounding plain I saw great groves of palm trees. The air was hot and oppressive, and charged with moisture. There were two large stone halls upon the roof—they were doorless and windowless.

“This place is delightfully cool, papa,” said I; “why couldn’t we stop up here?”

“All very well, my child, if I were travelling with a large retinue, and could close the innumerable openings by means of curtains and tent-walls; but as it is we are better off below, where we have a little castle of our own, and it is impossible to intrude upon our privacy. This great building on the roof is only used by exalted personages, such as the territorial nobility and the governors of provinces; we must trust that we shall not meet any such gentry, as their crowds of idle and hungry servants can make things very unpleasant for the ordinary travel-

ler, who, when they are upon the road, very often finds a difficulty in obtaining either food or fodder."

Just then a villager entered the great courtyard; a gun was slung over his back, a knife and a pair of pistols were stuck in his girdle, and he carried a stick in one hand with a murderous-looking iron head the size of a small orange. Under his arm was a strange-looking little animal with very long legs, and an extraordinary-shaped tail, which was round and larger than the thing's head; the fur of the animal was of a grey colour and very curly. As it bleated piteously I knew it to be a lamb, but it was very unlike our idea of a lamb. The villager laid his stick and gun upon the ground, and placed the little animal, which was no larger than a big cat, upon his lap; then he took a short *chibouque* from his girdle and began to smoke.

"That," said my father, sententiously, and with evident satisfaction, "is our dinner."

"O papa," I cried, "the poor little thing can't be more than a few days old. You wouldn't have the heart to have it killed?"

"It's a month old at the very least," said my father, "and the younger the lamb the more tender is the roast," he added, in an ogre-like voice.

Then I saw our black boy leave his fire and cooking-pots, and advance to the villager with a patronising air; then he sat down by the man's side, and felt the poor little lamb all over, shaking his head the while; then he said something to the villager. The man rose evidently very indignant, spat upon the ground, snapped his fingers in the cook's face, and, slinging his gun and popping the lamb under his arm, stalked away towards the gateway of the caravanserai: but the black boy called him back; both sat down and faced each other, they then conversed excitedly for several minutes; then the black boy appeared to be attempting to take forcible possession of the lamb; then they shook their fists in each other's faces, and seemed to be using very unparliamentary language: again the villager prepared to depart, but the black boy, producing an empty brandy-bottle, invited him once more to be seated, and the interrupted negotiations recommenced. The villager examined the bottle very carefully, and then the black boy held up a half-*keran*, value sixpence, between his finger and thumb. The villager shook his head and smiled derisively. The black boy snatched up the brandy-bottle, and returned to his cooking operations with the air of a much ill-used man. After a minute or two, the villager

sauntered over to him and began to watch his cooking with great apparent interest, but without speaking a word. The cook once more produced the empty bottle, and, carefully dusting it, placed it on the floor of the archway. For several minutes the villager sat in silence staring at the bottle. At length the cook took out a whole *keran*, and exhibited it to the villager. Then they shrieked at each other in chorus for several minutes : at last the bargain was concluded, the cook tied up the lamb by means of his girdle to one of the packing-cases, and then the *chibouque* was passed from one to the other several times ; then the villager thrust the empty bottle into the breast of his garment, pocketed the *keran*, said “ *Khoda hafiz shuma* ” (God be with you) in a loud voice, and went his way with a satisfied expression upon his face.

Another villager now arrived with some dates, which were chaffered for and purchased in a similar manner. Then we went down to our archway, which was now ready for our reception, and, hidden behind the wall of luggage, I was at last able to remove my veil and partake of a much-needed repast of tea and sweet biscuits. My father then gave me a long Persian lesson which lasted till breakfast-time, after which we took a siesta ; and in

the cool of the afternoon the old woman and I walked about upon the roof of the caravanserai, and I aired my few words of Persian to the best of my ability, and did all I could to increase my very limited vocabulary.

Each evening my father continued his narrative. It will perhaps simplify matters if I first describe the incidents of our journey, which were all so new and strange to me, and then give the history of my father in a condensed form, and so avoid the monotony which every one feels when they read the oft-repeated remark of Dinarzadé in the 'Thousand-and-one Nights,' "O my sister, I pray you to finish before daybreak the story you began yesterday." I only wish for my readers' sakes that I could boast of a little of the eloquence of Scheherazadé, who was, as we all know, the elder sister, and Queen of Persia.

We started close upon midnight, and, in the cool of the morning, reached a palm-grove, where we encamped in a sort of mud hovel: it was a "shelter," just a shelter from wind or rain, and absolutely nothing more. There was a hot spring in the immediate neighbourhood, full of the tiniest of tiny fish; how they managed to live in the water I could not imagine, for one could only just bear one's fingers in it. Nanna Rejab and I went into the

palm-grove in the afternoon: I was altogether disenchanted. There is very little poetry, and less shade, about a grove of date-palms; their principal advantage appears to be that they require little or no attention. There is a muddy hole at the foot of each tree, into which water is turned when it can be obtained, so as to keep the roots of the palm moist. For this watering of the palm-grove the cultivator receives a tenth of the produce, and the Government takes another tenth, so the freeholder of the grove gets four-fifths of the harvest of dates. In the distance a palm-grove looks delightfully cool and green, but there is nothing beautiful about it at close quarters, even at its best, when one can see the great bunches of sticky yellow fruit. My stepmother in Shiraz had a pair of the *bulbul-i-khūrma* or date-nightingales. These little birds much resemble the real nightingale, though their song is very inferior: the birds were excessively tame, and lived in a little cage whose door was always open. The fact is, that the date-nightingale feeds entirely on dates, and when it is brought up-country on to the higher table-land, where there are no date-palms, it has to return to its cage or starve. There were innumerable jerboa-rats too, which lived in holes in the ground, and didn't seem in the least fright-

ened at my approach, hopping and jumping about merrily, and almost allowing me to catch them: they have a tufted tail which is sometimes carried as the squirrel does his brush, and sometimes used as a fifth leg after the manner of the kangaroo; this tail seems considerably longer than the body. If one sits quite still one sees the little animals jumping about in a succession of leaps which give one the idea of a number of birds that are flying and settling again. They sit up too on their hind-legs, just as our squirrels do; they are a yellowish-grey in colour, and, when motionless, are very difficult to distinguish from the sandy soil. They make successive leaps of over a couple of yards, and, when I ran after them, disappeared into their burrows as though by magic. There were numerous *moosh-i-khūrma* too (date-mouse), a species of small mongoose, which seemed to live entirely in the palms. In leaping from branch to branch they appeared to fly. They are easily tamed, and make very interesting pets; I had one subsequently, of which I grew very fond. After dinner Rejab brought me a jerboa-rat, which he had caught and had imprisoned in a little wooden hutch; but before we started, though the wall of its prison was an inch thick, it had succeeded in gnawing its way out, to my great disappointment.

The people in this neighbourhood all go about armed to the teeth, for the principle of the Corsican *vendetta* is rigorously carried out, most of the inhabitants being rather Arabs than Persians, and almost every man has inherited a series of blood-feuds: it is a point of honour with these people to shed blood for blood, and no man dare go unarmed, or out of the immediate neighbourhood of his own village; and the only way of putting to rest these quarrels, other than by murder, is by means of a marriage between the families of the contending parties.

. Our next march had to be done in daylight, for we now began to ascend the mountain-passes which lead to the lofty central table-land of Persia. My heart was frequently in my mouth as my mule scrambled up rocky paths, where a false step would mean our falling down a precipice; but I soon became callous, and ignored the undoubted dangers, being lost in admiration of the varied panorama of beautiful mountain scenery which was being continually unrolled before my astonished eyes. The *kotuls* or passes (*kotul* is the Persian for ladder) are certainly sufficiently terrific; the muleteers encourage their animals by loud shouts and cries; and I noticed that my father invariably led his still restive horse over the worst places, while Rejab always was ready at the head

of my mule. On the fifth day we reached Kazerūn. It seemed a large but ruinous place, entirely built of mud; but we avoided the town itself, taking up our quarters in a tumble-down three-roomed house, situated in an orange-grove, which was surrounded by high walls. Here we took a much-needed three days' rest—all the animals, with the exception of my father's horse, being thoroughly knocked up by our last two days' mountain climbing. Besides the orange-trees, there were hundreds of fruit-trees in the great walled garden,—apples, pears, quinces, apricots, peaches, pomegranates, and walnut-trees gave a delicious shade; the surface of the ground was covered by a thick carpet of the red-flowering clover; while here and there would be immense bushes of the *Gul-i-soorkh*, or moss-rose, covered with magnificent blooms. The moss-rose is largely grown around Kazerūn for the manufacture of rose-water, for which the place is celebrated; the air was literally heavy with the smell of roses. A babbling brook, a very rare thing in Persia, ran through the middle of this lovely wild garden. My father and I used to sit up late into the night, chatting in the brilliant moonlight; while the babble of the stream, the bubbling music of innumerable hidden nightingales—literally the bulbul singing his love-song to the

rose—and the distant wailing cries of the jackals, which resembled nothing so much as the weeping of small children, rendered sleep impossible. Nobody came near us to disturb our tranquillity; the mere fact that my father was accompanied by what were vaguely designated his “women and children” was quite sufficient to insure our privacy: even the worst-bred Oriental would never willingly intrude upon the women of others. I was now able to temporarily discard my outer veil, for, as my father said, the solitary gardener, “being a very old man, didn’t matter”; and as to veiling myself from Rejab and the black boy, *when there was nobody looking*, that was quite unnecessary; but I must do them the justice to say that, whenever they caught sight of me without my veil, they invariably looked the other way, *out of politeness*.

I was indeed sorry when our halt at Kazerūn came to an end; I felt wofully inclined to cry as I clambered into my *kajawa* with my father’s assistance. I clutched in my hand a huge formal circular bouquet of moss-rosebuds, which the old gardener had handed to me on receiving a present of a few silver coins from my father. How I had enjoyed those three idle, delightful, luxurious days of perfect rest. I began to feel that my

“down-trodden sisters in the East” were not so very much to be pitied after all. And then the mule started, and his bells began to jangle, and the *kajawa* began to roll, and I gradually grew qualmish, and then I broke down and cried myself to sleep. As the Persian sage says, “When you cease to enjoy yourself, it is good to temporarily quit the weary world and take sanctuary in the Land of Dreams and Fancies.”

All through that long day's march—during which the date-groves grew fewer and far between, in the midst of magnificent mountain scenery, with an occasional glimpse of a distant sparkling lake which lay to our right, backed by a range of serrated mountains—we clambered over and between great rocks, boulders, and loose stones. We had to travel in the hot sun, for it would have been impossible to get over the Pass of the Old Woman and the Pass of the Virgin by night. How we managed it I cannot tell; but after an eleven hours' march without a halt, save those caused by the difficulty of the way, the weary beasts staggered in under the half-ruined gateway of the miserable caravanserai known as Mean Kotul (lit., the caravanserai in the midst of the passes). The place was full of way-worn beasts and tired travellers. My father, by a small

payment, succeeded in getting some villagers to vacate their quarters. Nanna Rejab, who seemed never to feel fatigue of any kind, insisted on kneeling and rubbing my tired limbs with one hand, while she fanned me with the other: then she sang me to sleep, as was her custom; and when I awoke an hour after dawn, I found that our little party were the only occupants of the great ruined caravanserai. We had two more marches through wooded mountain scenery of extreme beauty, and then we crossed the Zinyūn river and entered the table-land of Persia. Since leaving Kazerūn, we had seen no villages, save an occasional tiny cluster of mud hovels. The forest had gradually disappeared, and the plains became bare, being only covered by little clumps of camel-thorn and an occasional patch of brushwood; the distant views towards Kazerūn were still magnificently beautiful, but we had one solid consolation—the road was good; and to appreciate this to its fullest extent, one requires to have crossed Persian mountain-passes in a *kajawa*. Another day's march, which we made at night over the melancholy plain, brought us to Chenar Rahdar, the last stage but one, where elaborate preparations had been made for our reception. Two smartly-dressed servants assisted my

father to alight on our arrival, kissing his hands and making great protestations of fidelity. The little room we occupied in the caravanserai was carpeted with soft rugs of gorgeous colours; four brass candle-lamps with shades of ruby glass stood in the recesses, in one of which was a basin filled with an immense bouquet of double narcissus. The old woman received from one of the gaily-dressed servants a handsome *kalian*, or water-pipe, the bowl and water-vessel of which were of chased silver, and which, my father explained, was a delicate attention on the part of my stepmother to me. In a corner of the room was a brass bowl, in which lay a couple of green flagons of Shiraz wine, cooling in melting snow, and a tray containing small cucumbers, green unripe plums, a plate of cherries, and various dried fruits. A most sumptuous repast was served to us, the *pièce de résistance* of which was a lamb roasted whole, stuffed with dates, pistachios, almonds, and chestnuts; in its mouth was a little bouquet of herbs, while on its head was fixed a small lighted candle. And now we all of us had what in England is termed a "wash and brush-up." Nanna Rejab discarded her patched and tattered garments, and appeared in a new pair of shoes, white cotton socks,

and a complete costume of gaudy-coloured chintzes; while in a handsome young fellow who strutted about outside in a long garment of sky-blue silk I recognised, to my astonishment, her son Rejab; and I not unwillingly put on the gay apparel which I had worn once before in Bushire.

My father was evidently a person of consideration.

He now told me that a trifling march of eight miles in the cool of the morning would bring us home to his house in Shiraz. As he bade me good-night, he added meaningly, "You must try and hit it off with your stepmother to-morrow, Madge, for your future happiness will a great deal depend upon that."

I may now perhaps proceed with the continuation of my father's narrative, with which he had beguiled the tedium of the numerous halts in our journey towards Shiraz.

MY FATHER'S STORY CONTINUED.

"When I presented myself at the Itizad's laboratory, I was, to my astonishment, refused admittance. A Jew peered at me through an iron grating in the heavy door. 'Go away, man,' he said; 'it's no use coming here to try and gratify your curiosity. I tell

you there is nothing to see, and if there were,' he added, with a chuckle, 'I wouldn't show it you. Be off!'

"Take care you don't get into trouble, unsainted dog,' I cried, indignantly. 'Know, wretch, that I am Methuen Beg, Lecturer on Chemistry at the Royal College, and in the service of his Highness the Itizad.'

"You are his Excellency the Englishman, then,' grumbled the Jew; 'if your nobility had only deigned to say so, I would have opened the door. May your footsteps be fortunate. Your Excellency is indeed welcome,' cried the Jew, obsequiously, as he let me in, and having done so, he reshot the heavy bolts in the thick door. 'Allow a being infinitely beneath your contempt to introduce himself to your Excellency's notice. I am Hezekeeyeh, the Hebrew. I have the honour to kiss your Excellency's garment,' he added, and he suited the action to the word.

"And you are the doorkeeper here, I suppose,' I said.

"No; I am his Highness's confidential assistant,' replied the Jew. 'No one is ever admitted to this place except one or two of his most intimate friends; but you, *Mashallah*! you, Methuen Beg, are one of the Illuminati, one who is familiar with the secrets of

nature, who has the jinns and dives at his command, and is on familiar terms with the *Shaitan*¹ himself. Ah, it's a wonderful business, Methuen Beg, the best business in the world, if it wasn't so terribly dangerous,' said the Jew, dropping his voice.

"‘Well, I can't say that I ever looked upon it as dangerous,' I said, in astonishment.

"‘Not for you, perhaps,' replied the Hebrew; ‘you are, fortunately for you, a foreigner, and to the foreigner everything is lawful—even an intimate acquaintance with the Prince of Darkness. I have been a man of science from my youth upwards; but I have found it impossible to live upon science in this country, so I had to add to my real occupation—which is that of an alchemist—the profession of a *hakim*, or physician, and I did the largest trade in Teheran in love-philtres, charms, and amulets. I was so fortunate, that all the other doctors in the place grew jealous of me. I was arrested as a poisoner. Because forsooth there was an epidemic of cholera, I was accused of poisoning the city fountains, and condemned to be roasted alive. I was saved by the interposition of his Royal Highness. The mob of Teheran, indignant at being deprived of a

¹ *Shaitan* = the devil.

pleasant spectacle, attempted to wreck the palace of the Itizad, and if I dared to show my nose outside this place I should assuredly be stoned to death or torn in pieces. In this country one pursues science under difficulties, Methuen Beg, as you will find out. Shall I have the honour of showing your Excellency over the laboratory?' continued the Jew, briskly.

"I assented, and the old man conducted me at once through the apartments. The principal room contained a large furnace in either corner; the walls were hung with pieces of chemical apparatus of strange and archaic shape; there were innumerable retorts and alembics both of glass and metal, and quite a large collection of clay crucibles. In the centre of the room was a small raised platform of brickwork, on which was spread a handsome carpet.

"'From this place his Royal Highness condescends to superintend our investigations,' said Moollah Hezekeeyeh.

"'And what may you be investigating just now?' I asked.

"'We are engaged in the search for the Elixir of Life,' replied the Jew, with great solemnity; 'and we are preparing the Water of Eternal Youth,' he said, without moving a muscle.

“‘If you succeed in preparing the latter,’ I said, ‘I don’t see what you want with the former.’

“‘Well,’ said the Jew, familiarly, ‘our patron is a very old man; he naturally thinks that, when we have succeeded in discovering the Elixir, he might find the Water of Eternal Youth extremely useful.’

“‘You don’t mean to say,’ I cried, ‘that his Highness believes in the Elixir of Life?’

“‘Of course he does,’ retorted the Jew; ‘and so do I, and so do you. There is nothing impossible to the true man of science,’ he added, drily.

“I found myself in rather a difficult position. It seemed to me very evident that if I remained in the service of the Itizad I must become a charlatan of the most miserable type, and that if I denounced the Jew I should be looked upon as an ignoramus and an impostor. Hezekeeyeh now led me into the adjoining apartment; it was fitted from floor to ceiling with shelves which contained a collection of bottles, jars, and phials, each carefully labelled with the Latin name of its contents.

“‘This,’ said the Jew, ‘is the Cabinet of European chemicals. One of your duties, O my master,’ he went on, ‘will be to ascertain the nature of the mysterious

substances and fluids contained in these vessels, which have only recently arrived from Feringhistan' (Europe).

"I inspected them more nearly. I found that the arrangement was peculiar: they had been classified by their colours, and the solids were placed on one side of the room, the liquids on the other. There were shelves of green drugs and chemicals, of white ones, of yellow ones, and so on. A bottle of ether stood next to one of aquafortis, while the next on the shelf was one containing peppermint-water.

"'It will then,' continued the Jew, 'become your duty to explain to his Highness the uses and properties of the various substances.'

"I learned afterwards that the Itizad had instructed the Persian Ambassador in London to secure for him the stock and trade utensils of a European alchemist. An order such as this would have daunted most men, but the Ambassador was equal to the occasion. He bought the entire contents of the shop of a bankrupting chemist, and so carried out the instructions of the Minister of Sciences, who was so pleased that he caused the decoration of the Shah's Portrait, set in diamonds, to be immediately forwarded to the fortunate Ambassador.

“‘This,’ said the Jew, as he led me into another room, ‘is the cabinet of chemicals and drugs known to the Arabian and Persian philosophers; with these I am perfectly familiar, and many of them are doubtless not unknown to you. This,’ he said, pointing to a pickle-bottle, ‘is *sumbulfars* (or white arsenic); here is *darishkinneh* (or corrosive sublimate)—both valuable poisons, and useful remedies. This,’ he said, pointing to another bottle containing lumps of bitumen, ‘is *mūm yāi*, a substance upon whose virtues I need not dilate,’ he added, airily. ‘Mummy powder,’ he went on, tapping another. ‘Stone of Hell,’ he continued, proudly exhibiting some old blackened sticks of caustic; and so he went on, passing from bottle to bottle.

“I found that the cabinet of Arabian chemicals consisted of minerals, poisons, and innumerable homely drugs and herbs, with high-sounding and fanciful names, while some of the bottles contained ingredients of the most extraordinary character.

“‘This,’ said the Jew, triumphantly pointing out a very carefully sealed jar, ‘is a sovereign remedy; it contains the dried and powdered heart of a professional wrestler. Lion’s fat,’ he added, pointing to another bottle. ‘The one taken internally, and the other

used as an ointment, are productive of strength and courage combined. His Highness uses both regularly, and is greatly satisfied with the result.'

"I fancied that I caught a twinkle in the old Jew's eye as he uttered the words.

"We had hardly completed our review of the oriental medicaments and chemicals when a loud knocking at the outer door announced the arrival of the Itizad-u-Sultaneh. He was accompanied by a crowd of retainers, who, however, all remained outside, the old nobleman entering the laboratory alone, the Jew carefully securing the door after him.

"I saluted him respectfully.

"'Peace be with you, Methuen Beg,' he cried, courteously. 'And, you dog, have you duly exhibited to our Lecturer on Chemistry the contents of our Treasure-house of Knowledge?'

"'It is the humble representation of your abject slave,' replied the old man, 'that he has conducted the European sage over the entire establishment; and the illustrious foreigner has been pleased to compliment the least of your slaves upon the arrangement of the drugs and chemicals;' here the Jew gave me an imploring look.

"The Itizad, taking no notice of his remarks, proceeded to the central apartment, and at once took his seat upon the carpeted platform.

"'Now, Methuen Beg,' he said, addressing me, 'it is my pleasure to examine you. What do you know of the constituents of the Elixir of Life?'

"'May it please your Royal Highness,' I replied, 'no European philosopher has yet succeeded in fathoming that mysterious secret. My attention has been principally directed to chemical analysis, which is the art of ascertaining the constituents of any substance, simple or compound, that may be submitted for my examination. Until now my researches have not led me in the direction of the Elixir of Life; my humble services however are, such as they are, entirely at your Highness's disposition.'

"'Good,' said the Itizad; 'you speak with becoming humility. But be it known to you that I am on the very verge of making the immortal discovery. I have trodden in the steps of the greatest of the Arabian Sages, and have already succeeded in projecting both gold and silver from the baser metals,' he added, proudly. 'But of your Western science I am not ashamed to confess myself entirely ignorant, and it is for the pur-

pose of sucking your brains that I have taken you into my service. In how many days or weeks can you instruct me in all the secrets of your art ?’

“ ‘May it please your Highness,’ I replied, ‘in Europe we study a science systematically. I pursued chemistry for seven years before I obtained the necessary certificates of proficiency.’

“ ‘Ah ! but,’ said the old nobleman, ‘you didn’t begin as an expert ; I do, which makes all the difference.’

“ ‘It makes all the difference, your Highness,’ I replied, with a courtier-like bow.

“ ‘Of course it does,’ said the Itizad, evidently much pleased ; ‘you are truly an unbeliever of much perspicacity. We will then commence our studies at once. Look on me, Methuen Beg, simply as a pupil, merely as a sagacious inquirer who is not to be deceived, humbugged, or hoodwinked, even by the most astute. You will lecture to me upon the Science of Chemistry, and remember to be as concise as possible. Begin.’

“I was a little taken aback, I confess, but I took him at his word, and I commenced at once. ‘May it please your Highness,’ I began, ‘I will be, as you have suggested, as concise as possible. According to European ideas, everything in the world we live in

is resolvable into certain ultimate elements either solid or gaseous. Water, for instance, is composed of two elementary gases—namely, oxygen and hydrogen; these when mixed in the requisite proportion form water.’

“‘That’s a lie,’ said the Itizad. ‘I told you not to attempt to deceive me.’

“I didn’t lose my temper. ‘I shall be happy to demonstrate the truth of my assertion to your Highness, if you will permit me to have the honour of doing so.’

“‘I always possess a mind open to conviction, Methuen Beg,’ said the old gentleman, very coldly; ‘seeing is believing.’

“In the course of half an hour I had constructed, in his Highness’s presence, the simple apparatus necessary for the manufacture, on a small scale, of the two gases. I was fortunate enough to discover among the paraphernalia of the chemist’s shop some empty soda-water-bottles; one of these I filled with oxygen and hydrogen in the requisite proportions, my operations being jealously watched the while by the Itizad. I pointed out to him that the soda-water-bottle was absolutely dry, and though containing the mixed gases, apparently empty. I now applied a lighted match to

the mouth of the bottle, there was a loud explosion which frightened the Itizad very considerably, and there was no doubting the presence of the water, which became condensed on the inside of the soda-water-bottle.

“‘How did you manage it?’ cried the Itizad, excitedly. ‘It was a wonderful trick,—had you a concealed pistol?’

“I assured him that there was no deception, that the thing was the simplest of simple experiments, and I repeated it to his great delight. I was about to proceed with my lecture, but his Highness stopped me.

“‘Don’t let us be in too great a hurry, Methuen Beg,’ he said. ‘Do you think I might learn to perform that transcendent miracle myself?’

“I assured him that nothing was easier. I showed him how to fill the bottle with water, and to invert it with its neck beneath the surface of water in a basin. I explained to him the simple means of making the two gases, and of conducting them into the soda-water-bottle. Just as an intelligent boy would have understood the *modus operandi* and imitated it, so did the Itizad. But just like the boy he didn’t want to trouble himself about

the properties of oxygen or hydrogen; what he liked was the mysterious filling of the soda-water-bottle with gas, and above all the loud bang. He repeated the experiment over and over again.

“‘One of the greatest evidences of the genius of a philosopher,’ said the Itizad in a loud voice, ‘is the power of grasping facts which are new to him, of instantly forming a theory of his own, and by a flash of genius getting at the root of the matter at once. What you ignorantly call oxygen and hydrogen, O man, are but essence of thunder and extract of lightning; they are frequently mentioned in the works of the old Arabian writers. One of your Western so-called sages, a dreamer of the name of Franklin, is stated to have passed the greater portion of his life in flying a kite with an iron key attached to the tail of it, in order to bring down lightning from the clouds: he pretended that he had at last succeeded in doing this; he was, of course, an impostor,’ he added, sententiously. ‘For,’ he continued, ‘where is there fire without smoke, where is there lightning without thunder? and he never pretended to have brought the thunder down. There is no doubt truth in what you say, that the atmosphere is composed of what you call oxygen and hydrogen, and other things,’

he added, with a comprehensive wave of the hand, 'or, as I should more correctly put it, the atmosphere is made up of essence of thunder and extract of lightning; these get mixed by the action of the wind. The stars perform the function of your lighted match, and thunder and lightning, which have hitherto so much puzzled our philosophers, are at once produced. You follow me?'

"'It is a most ingenious theory, your Highness,' I replied; and I felt that I was becoming a courtier."

"'It isn't a theory, it's a fact,' cried the old nobleman, triumphantly. 'Besides, as you see, water is produced, and that accounts for the rain.'

"I bowed humbly; I felt that I could do nothing else."

"During the whole of the Itizad's speech, Hezekeeyeh the Jew had appeared lost in wonder and delight. 'Of course it is so,' he had cried. 'Where is Franklin now? Where is Aristotle? Where is Aflatoon [Plato]? Would that they were alive to have learned understanding from our master.'

"'Methuen Beg,' cried the Itizad, excitedly, 'what has taken place this morning must remain a secret. I shall take an early opportunity of communicating my

great discovery to his Majesty. What is the invention of gunpowder to a discovery such as mine? But it is time that I should attend the Council. You will occupy yourself in the examination and classification of the contents of that room,' he said. 'We will repeat our experiments to-morrow; and in order that the humblest of my fellow-labourers, for I do not hesitate to give you that title,' he added, patronisingly, 'should not go unrewarded, I will instruct my steward to present you with a riding-mule and his trappings, for it is not good that a philosopher and man of learning should be compelled to walk.'

"I expressed my gratitude in suitable terms, and then the Jew and I respectfully escorted his Highness to the outer gate of the laboratory."

CHAPTER VIII.

CONTINUATION OF MY FATHER'S HISTORY.

"THE next afternoon, the morning having been passed by the Itizad and myself in filling soda-water-bottles with a mixture of oxygen and hydrogen gases, I was ordered to attend in the hall of the Thousand and One Miracles, where all the scientific men of Teheran had been convened by his Highness the Itizad. On my entry I found them seated round the floor of the great apartment, and I was astonished to perceive that the scientific men of Teheran were, as a rule, a very ragged and hungry-looking lot. Kelb Ali Khan, who presided at the meeting, received me most affably, and introduced me to the chief men of the assembly.

"‘This,’ he said, presenting me to a fat man of very solemn aspect, ‘is the Shah’s chief physician; the vast stores of his learning are inexhaustible, and it is not to

be wondered at, for his family have been physicians time out of mind. He has succeeded in inventing, after years of prayer, abstinence, and meditation, a sovereign balm for the feet of persons who have been bastinadoed; I myself can testify to its great efficacy, and there is not a man in this assembly who cannot say the same.' Here everybody smiled, nodded, and bowed to the Hakim-bashi, and he condescended to acknowledge my introduction by a scowl and a grunt; for he was one of the innumerable Syuds, or self-styled descendants of Mohammed, and he was hand and glove with the priests and men of the law.

“‘The Monajem-bashi or chief astrologer,’ said Kelb Ali Khan, presenting me to a little dried-up old man seated next the chief physician, ‘enjoys the full confidence of his Majesty; doubtless his name is well known in Europe. He possesses the secret of discovering the situation of subterranean springs and the presence of mineral ores by means of the divining-rod, and is skilled in the prediction of fortunate hours, and by an apparently casual inspection of the heavens he can discover or prophesy happy conjunctions of the celestial bodies. He has also the good fortune to be the son-in-law of the Arch-priest of Teheran. The Chief Astrologer favoured me with a patronising nod.

“The two persons to whom I had been introduced were the only well-dressed men in the room. Then Kelb Ali Khan ran through a long string of names, and as each man heard his name pronounced, he bobbed his head at me, and gave me a more or less sour smile.

“‘Be seated, Methuen Beg,’ said the Master of the Mint, indicating a place immediately below that of the astrologer, and I noticed that his next-door neighbour made way for me very reluctantly indeed. Then the whole company maintained a whispered conversation for some minutes, when a curtain was flung aside, and we all rose to our feet upon the arrival of the Itizad: he was followed by a gorgeously dressed servant bearing a covered tray. As soon as his Highness had seated himself at the head of the room, with a wave of the hand he commanded us to resume our places: then, beginning with Kelb Ali Khan, he asked each of us in succession in a low whisper if he were quite well; and each man replied that, through the kindness and condescension of his Highness, he *was* quite well, and each man in his turn hoped that his Highness was quite well; then every one, commencing with the Itizad himself, was handed a cup of tea. Then a procession of servants entered the room bearing gold and silver water-pipes: these were smoked

in silence for some moments, with great solemnity ; then the pipes were removed and the servants retired. And now the Itizad, clearing his throat, commenced a long speech. He announced his great discovery with considerable circumlocution, and by means of long-sounding words, most of which, being Arabic, I was unable to understand ; then he informed his astonished audience that he had succeeded in bottling thunder and lightning, and producing rain itself *on a small scale*, and he gravely propounded his original and startling theories on the subject of atmospheric phenomena. Then each man raised his hands in astonishment and admiration, and complimented his Highness in a sort of chorus. Then the Itizad took the cover from the tray ; on it were a number of carefully corked soda-water-bottles, and with three of them the Itizad produced loud reports ; then the three bottles were handed round and carefully examined ; then each member of the company received one of the corked bottles.

“ ‘Go to your homes, my good people,’ said the Itizad, ‘repeat my experiment for yourselves, after which you have my full permission to publish my great discovery to the astonished world. This discovery of mine,’ he said, ‘will have incalculable results, for I have almost per-

fecting a plan by which I shall be able to produce rainfall at will. Go,' he added, 'you are dismissed. Methuen Beg,' he said to me good-naturedly, as I took my leave, 'have you obtained your mule yet?'

"I thanked his Highness, and informed him that the animal and its trappings had been delivered to me, and expressed my gratitude in suitable terms.

" 'Good,' said his Highness. 'You have my permission to take a holiday to-morrow; I shall not require your services, having important business with his Majesty.'

"I respectfully took my leave, and returned to my quarters.

"The next day I took a long ride upon my new acquisition in the environs of Teheran. Upon my return, late in the afternoon, I was hurriedly summoned to the presence of the Itizad: the aged nobleman was in very great tribulation indeed, his face was covered with pieces of plaister, and both his hands were enveloped in bandages.

" 'Methuen Beg,' he said, 'a very great misfortune has befallen me. The Shah ordered that I should repeat my experiment in his presence; I was anxious to do so upon the grandest scale. With the assistance of Heze-keeyeh, I this morning succeeded in producing a very large quantity both of the essence of thunder and of

the extract of lightning, I took the very largest bottle I could find from the stock of the European alchemist, a vessel containing about five gallons, which I discovered to be marked with the symbol of the planet Mercury, and I filled it with the invisible gases in just proportion. I then carefully secured the mouth of the vessel and proceeded to the presence of the Shah; I explained to him my sublime discovery, and I demonstrated its truth only too successfully. On applying a light to the mouth of the bottle, a tremendous explosion took place; one of the royal pages who held the bottle is in a worse plight than I am, and his beauty is, alas! gone for ever. The King, naturally incensed at the injury to royal property, immediately fined me two thousand *tomans*, and has very nearly bastinadoed Hezekeeyeh to death; and, what is worse, has ordered me to produce rain within twenty-four hours. What am I to do, Methuen Beg,' he added piteously, 'what am I to do? I am perfectly certain of the truth of my theory, but how on earth am I to apply the light to the essence of thunder and the extract of lightning, which are of course floating high above our heads. The Shah, may I be his sacrifice, added that, if I did not succeed, my beard should be plucked out by the roots.'

"I shook my head, for I sympathised with the poor old man, who was evidently frightened out of his wits.

" 'I have thought of one expedient,' continued the Itizad; 'my last hope is, that it may succeed. I have summoned all the firework-makers in Teheran; I have ordered them to manufacture the very largest-sized rocket that human ingenuity has ever constructed: there it is,' he said, pointing to a huge firework that stood ready in the centre of the courtyard. 'What do you think, Methuen Beg—will it succeed?'

"It was spring-time, the sky was overcast, and there was every promise of rain. 'If you secure a *propitious moment* it may do so,' I replied, enigmatically. 'I think I should have a man ready to let it off.'

"His Highness immediately ordered one of the servants to stand ready by the rocket.

"The sky was getting blacker and blacker every moment.

" 'Set it off at once, your Excellency,' I cried, as I saw a large heat-drop appear, only to disappear again, on the warm tiles of the courtyard.

"The old man waved his bandaged hand, up went the great rocket with a tremendous whizz, and down came

the rain in bucketsful; the thunder began to roar, the lightning flashed.

“‘*Alhamdillilah!* (praise be to God!) I knew my theory was perfectly correct. My beard is saved, and my face is whitened before the Asylum of the Universe,’ cried the Itizad. ‘You will not forget,’ he added solemnly to me, ‘that the ingredients necessary for the preparation of the essence of thunder and extract of lightning are entirely exhausted by this gigantic effort. If the Shah wants more, he must get them from Europe for himself,’ then he laid his bandaged finger meaningly upon his lips.

“Nothing succeeds like success. The Itizad and his gigantic rocket were now the talk of Teheran—even in Persia people don’t let off big rockets in the afternoon—and there was no mistake whatever about the rain. The Shah was perfectly satisfied. The happy possessors of the bottled thunder and lightning sold their treasures at a fabulous price; and each one of them, including the Hakim-bashi and the Chief Astrologer, called upon me nominally to compliment me, really to angle for a fresh supply. But I stuck to my guns and assured them that the materials were entirely exhausted. The unfortunate Hezekeeyeh at that moment arrived from the royal

prison in a piteous condition, being carried into the room by four ragged-looking Hebrews; he had been so severely bastinadoed by the sub-executioners that he was unable to walk; his clothes had been torn to rags by his fellow-prisoners, and above his rags he wore a great Arab cloak of blue silk richly embroidered with gold thread, while in his hand he clutched a bag of money. The blue silk cloak was a dress of honour or *khalat*, which had been conferred upon him by the King, together with five hundred *kerans* in silver (about twenty-five pounds) as a salve for his wounded feet. Only the day before none of the *soi-disant* men of science would have taken the slightest notice of the unfortunate Jew—there is such a thing as professional jealousy even in Persia; and the Jew, being also a *quasi* man of science, each and every one of them were delighted that he had been beaten. But he was wearing a royal *khalat*, so they *had* to congratulate him: besides, every one of them had a secret hope that *he* might succeed in obtaining from the unhappy Jew, by bribes or flattery, the ingredients for making essence of thunder and extract of lightning; for though I had assured them that the materials were exhausted, yet each man in his heart disbelieved me. So they visited the Jew in a body.

“‘Moollah¹ Hezekeeyeh,’ said the Hakim-bashi, ‘our hearts bleed for you; it is indeed a sad spectacle to see a man of science in your condition. Speaking for my brethren here, and my words come from the heart, O Moollah, we all feel that science has been insulted in your person, and that you are a martyr for its sake. I myself will despatch to you immediately a large supply of my sovereign balm for the soles of those in your condition; you will require a thousand and one little comforts; you will need essence of willow-flowers to strengthen your constitution; you will want sparrow and pomegranate soup, and the concentrated juices of roast lambs, while you must drink nothing but old wine and barley-sugar water during your convalescence; and innumerable medicaments and drugs of the most expensive kind will be needed, which your own experience as a doctor will enable you to suggest. I myself shall be only too happy to undertake your gratuitous cure, which will be naturally long and protracted. Mirza Sitara,’ he continued, turning to the Chief Astrologer, ‘please indicate to me the amount of your contribution.’

“The Chief Astrologer, very much against the grain, counted out twenty pieces of silver upon the carpet.

¹ *Moollah* means priest. The title is given to Jews, partly in derision.

‘I wish I could make it gold, Moollah,’ he said, turning to the Jew with a forced smile, ‘but things are bad with me just now; please therefore do not consider the amount, but look upon it as a trifling tribute to your scientific attainments.’

“And so with many hypocritical expressions of goodwill, each man of science made his offering to the unhappy Jew; then the Hakim-bashi put the money into a saucer, and, rising, waved it three times round the Jew’s head for luck, and then placed it on the ground in front of the martyr to science.

“‘O Excellencies,’ cried the old man, ‘you do too much honour to an unfortunate Hebrew. I thank you from my heart. My pains,’ he added, making a wry face, ‘have, through your kindness, entirely disappeared. Above all, I wish to thank the Hakim-bashi, for his is indeed a priceless gift; that invaluable balm of his is worth more than all the money in that saucer.’

“‘It is indeed! He speaks no less than the truth,’ cried the Hakim-bashi, stroking his beard complacently.

“‘But,’ said the Jew, ‘what need have I for balms? The King himself healed my bruised feet, when he conferred on me this magnificent dress of honour. I would then respectfully suggest to your Excellencies that the

Hakim-bashi should exhibit his generosity in the form of cash.'

" 'He hath spoken well,' cried the men of science in chorus.

" 'Yes,' cried the Chief Astrologer, who regretted his twenty *kerans*, 'he has not overrated the value of the miraculous balm. Double the pool, Hakim-bashi, you cannot do less,' he added, with a malignant chuckle.

" Feeling that there was no escape, the Hakim-bashi made the best of the matter. 'You have spoken well,' he said, proudly; 'my remedy is indeed more precious than rubies: you might, O Moollah Hezekeeyeh, had you not used it, have disposed of it for its weight in gold; but, like the rest of your people, you prefer money to everything. Have your wish, much good may it do you,' he added, losing his temper. Then he directed his servant to double the amount in the saucer.

" As each of the visitors took his leave, he adjured me, in a whisper, not to forget *his* claim for the much-coveted ingredients. At length I found myself left alone with the Jew, who now began to wail and roar lustily.

" 'O Methuen Beg,' he cried, 'my feet are on fire: though they have been smeared with the yolk of egg,

anointed with sesamum-oil, and wrapped in spinach-leaves, they burn, ah how they burn! I feel as though I were walking across the red-hot bridge of Al Sirat, according to the absurd Mussulman fable. Ah,' he cried, with a yell, 'my feet are on fire!'

" 'Why didn't you accept the Hakim-bashi's remedy?' I asked, with some curiosity.

" 'His remedy, pooh! He is the Shah's Hakim-bashi, otherwise nobody would use his remedies. There is nothing like yolk of egg after a good bastinadoing—nothing like it. I ought to know,' he added, grimly, 'for I speak after many painful personal experiences.'

" I now found myself, through force of circumstances, in a position of honour and trust in the service of the Itizad. Never, by the slightest hint, did he or I ever allude to the fortunate discharge of the rocket. For some days the old gentleman really suffered from the injuries to his hands and face; and the King's French physician, M. D——, removed several pieces of the chemist's show-bottle (the vessel adorned with the symbol of Mercury) from the injured members. The Shah was continually sending to inquire after his relative's health, and for several weeks the wily old nobleman kept his hands in bandages, and declared that he was unable to

leave the house. For the first day or two he even received his visitors in bed, as is the custom of the country; and for a whole month his time was fully occupied in seeing vast crowds of personages of consideration, who waited upon him to express their sympathy and congratulations. So firmly were the people of Teheran persuaded that the Itizad-u-Sultaneh had discovered the art of producing rain at pleasure, that the price of grain fell, and with it the price of bread. This caused him, for the moment, to become the most popular man in the capital. The old nobleman now returned with renewed zest to his philosophical researches.

“‘I am getting old, Methuen Beg,’ he said one day to me, wearily; ‘and even if we should succeed in discovering the *Elizir Vitæ* it would profit me but little. Why, I never eat a good dinner but it disagrees with me. I haven’t a tooth in my head, as you see,’ he went on; ‘and what’s a good appetite without a good digestion?’

“‘In my country, your Excellency,’ I replied, ‘when we lose our teeth we purchase a set of new ones.’

“‘I’ve heard of that,’ he said; ‘but I had looked upon it as an idle tale.’

“I explained to him that in England the use of

artificial teeth was common. I told him that a gold frame was made to fit the gums, to which were affixed either human teeth or artificial ones made from the grinders of the hippopotamus.

“‘Ah,’ he said, wearily, ‘to use a dead man’s teeth would be, in our eyes, the height of uncleanness, and how am I to get the teeth of a hippopotamus in Persia?’

“I suggested that a cast might be taken of his Excellency’s mouth, from which I could take a model in plaster, which would be doubtless sufficient for a dentist in London or Paris to work upon.

“‘Yes; but, Methuen Beg,’ said the Itizad, ‘I should have to wait six months for my teeth. I have it,’ he said, ‘you’ll have to make me a set.’

“‘I am not a dentist, your Excellency,’ I cried.

“‘Oh yes, you are,’ retorted his Excellency, piously; ‘you are, if it be the will of Providence. Only make me a set of teeth, Methuen Beg, and I will obtain for you the post of Dentist-in-Ordinary to the Queen-mother; she hasn’t a tooth in her head, and is the most powerful person in the kingdom, next to the Shah himself. Why, you would make your fortune in a year or two,’ cried the Itizad.

“I was anxious to oblige my patron, but I confess

that I did not quite see my way. 'The frame I might manage, your Excellency,' I said; 'but how about the teeth?'

"Every Persian has a fertile imagination.

" 'Let me see,' said the Itizad; 'why not make them of pure gold? There's nothing unclean about pure gold; besides,' he added triumphantly, 'they might be ornamental as well as useful. Each tooth,' he went on, 'at all events each front tooth, might be decorated with a precious stone. Diamonds would look best, of course; there need be no difficulty about the diamonds. Here you,' he shouted, calling to a servant, 'order the Chief Jeweller to attend me at once.'

"At the end of a fortnight I had completed my labours,—I had produced a set of teeth in solid gold of the most substantial construction: they were a trifle heavy perhaps, but then each front tooth was ornamented by a large rose diamond.

"His Highness was delighted with the result. After a considerable amount of filing and fitting, he was actually able to wear them, and in a few days' time he announced to me that they had ceased to inconvenience him, and that he could even eat with them. The old gentleman was very proud of his new teeth,

and he was continually smiling in order to exhibit the diamonds, and when he did this his appearance was sufficiently startling. He went to Court and was personally complimented by the King and the Prime Minister. He told me with great pride that every now and then the King, upon the arrival of each fresh courtier, would say, 'Itizad-u-Sultaneh, show him your teeth;' and that his principal enemy, the Chief Eunuch, on expressing his incredulity as to their utility, had been playfully ordered by the youthful monarch to place his finger between them, 'which he did,' said the Itizad, 'and I bit it to the bone. Ah, Methuen Beg,' he continued, with great gusto, 'the taste of an enemy's blood is very sweet,' and then he grinned ferociously, and exhibited the double row of large rose diamonds.

"In his gratitude the old nobleman presented me with a handsome Arab horse completely equipped with silver trappings, and a sum, equivalent to fifty pounds, in gold; and I was ordered to wait upon the Queen-mother, who at once appointed me her Dentist-in-Ordinary, with a liberal salary, which was of course never paid; but I became a man of position and a Court official, which was my consolation. I knew nothing about dentistry, of course, but then I knew more than the Persians did,

and I provided her Majesty with a set of teeth of the most massive description, the front ones being ornamented with pearls of the largest size: they really looked very well, and I was handsomely rewarded for my trouble.

“Her Majesty the Queen-mother, though no longer in her first youth, was, it was said, still a fine woman, and she was excessively vain of her personal appearance. It may surprise you when I tell you that, though I did actually take the moulds for that wonderful set of teeth of hers, yet I never saw her face, but it was so, nevertheless: I was ordered to attend at her palace for four successive days; it was only on the last day that she would receive me, and then she only consented to do so from behind a curtain. I was introduced by the chief eunuch of her deceased husband, Mohammed Shah, into a magnificent but empty apartment; he led me to a curtained doorway, before which I stood respectfully, while he sat down close to the curtain to act as moral filter.

“‘Is this the unbelieving toothmaker?’ said a shrill voice from behind the curtain.

“‘May it please the most Gracious and Lovable,’ quavered out the old eunuch, ‘it is.’

“‘It is a pity he is an unbeliever,’ said the voice;

'he's a better-looking man than most infidels. Where is the interpreter, O Mustapha Aga?'

"'The foreign unbeliever speaks Persian,' grunted out the eunuch.

"'Then why didn't you say so before, you old fool,' cried the loud imperious voice from behind the curtain. 'Ask him if he is skilled in the manufacture of artificial teeth,' it continued in a lower tone. 'Ask him if he really made the Crown of Glory which the Itizad-u-Sultaneh wears in his mouth, and of which I have heard so much from the ladies of his *anderûn* (seraglio). Tell him it's no use his lying to me, and if he does I'll break every bone in his body.'

"I replied through the old eunuch that I certainly had made a set of teeth for the Itizad, but that it was my first attempt, and that I hoped to be still more successful at the second, and I added indiscreetly that I was not in the habit of telling lies.

"A loud incredulous laugh immediately came from behind the curtain. 'A man and a European,' cried the imperious voice. 'Are not all men liars, and are not Europeans princes among liars? Tell him to make me a set of teeth twice as good as the Itizad's and bring them with him in the morning.'

“‘You hear?’ squeaked out the eunuch. ‘To hear is to obey.’

“‘Please to represent to her Majesty,’ I replied, ‘that it is first necessary to take a mould of the royal mouth.’

“‘*Woi, woi, woi!*’ cried the voice from behind the veil. ‘Here is sacrilege! Here is a disgraceful proposition!’

“A chorus of female voices expressed their horror, indignation, and disgust from behind the curtain.

“‘Ashes on our heads!’ cried the eunuch, roused to a pitch of fury. ‘Do you not know, O man, that no male persons, save his Majesty himself and the husband of the august lady who is now honouring you by an audience, are privileged to gaze on her more than celestial beauty and yet live?’

“‘Will you kindly represent to her Majesty,’ I replied to him, ‘that I am desirous of taking my leave, and that I request permission to retire?’

“‘Man,’ said the voice from behind the curtain, ‘is it absolutely necessary that you should take a mould of my mouth? Must we eat this abomination of yours, or do without our teeth? Must we suffer this horrible indignity, and—and——? Have you the necessary appliances with you?’

"I replied that I had brought with me all that was needful.

" 'Then, Mustapha Aga,' said the voice, 'for our royal son's sake, and for our husband's sake,¹ we will submit. Let the necessary preparations be made.'

"There was a great hurrying and scuffling behind the curtain, a musical jingling of bracelets and bangles and the rustle of silks, and a hum of whispered talk, in which the expressions of horror *Woi, woi, woi*, were plainly distinguishable. This lasted for several minutes.

" 'Bring in the unbelieving toothmaker,' cried the voice.

" 'Be careful, O man,' said the eunuch to me in a whisper; 'any indiscretion may cost you your life.' Then he raised the silken curtain, and, grasping me by my elbow, led me into the adjoining apartment, a large and beautiful room, the floor of which was covered with priceless carpets. On a chair in the centre of the room sat a lady with legs bare to the knee, dressed in a petticoat of yellow cashmere shawl, the edge of which was ornamented with pearls, each of which was of the size of a small marble. Of the rest of her costume I could see nothing, for it was carefully muffled in a *chardūr* or blue silk

¹ The Queen-mother had contracted a second marriage.

out-door veil. Behind her Majesty were two rows of closely-veiled ladies who stood discreetly in a large semicircle.

“ ‘Mustapha Aga,’ said her Majesty, ‘make the necessary preparations, and warn the unbelieving toothmaker not to come too near.’

“Then the old eunuch took his pen-case from his girdle, and produced from it a long slender pair of scissors. He proceeded to cut a round hole in that part of the blue silk veil which concealed her Majesty’s mouth.

“The less I say of her Majesty’s mouth the better; in one detail it exactly resembled that of my patron the Itizad,—she hadn’t a tooth in her head. After many protestations her Majesty permitted me to take a mould in wax. I then took my leave.

“The Court goldsmith was placed at my disposal. At the end of a fortnight I went to her Majesty’s palace with Mustapha Aga, the eunuch. Her Majesty was pleased to express her satisfaction, and rewarded me with a very handsome gratuity. ‘Now,’ thought I, ‘my fortune is made; half the wealthy old women in Teheran will come to me for false teeth; in a year or two I shall be a rich man, and able to return to Europe.’

But my Alnaschar's Vision was suddenly dispelled by the Queen-mother.

“‘We are more than satisfied, O unbelieving tooth-maker,’ said her Majesty, addressing me. ‘For the sake of our august son, the Asylum of the Universe, we have suffered horrible indignities at your hands; in any other person but ourself, such abominations would have been shameful, indecent, and highly immoral. It is our duty to watch carefully over the women of Persia. Now remember this, most daring of unbelieving toothmakers, if you make teeth for any other woman in Persia I’ll have her strangled, and I’ll cut off your head; your being a foreigner will not protect you. I am not the Shah’s mother for nothing; when I want a head, I get it. Go! you are dismissed.’

“Thus it came about that, until her death several years afterwards, the Queen-mother was the only lady in Persia who wore artificial teeth.

“Ever since I had saved him from having his beard torn out by the roots, I had been looked upon with great favour by the Itizad, and one day he summoned me to his presence, and, dismissing all his attendants, addressed me as follows:—

“‘Methuen Beg,’ he said, with a smile, showing his

double row of glittering diamonds, 'I have been for some time thinking how to advance your interests without putting my hand into my pocket. You are, though you have the misfortune to be an unbeliever, a most trustworthy person. Now I need hardly tell you, that though my servants are bound to me by ties of interest, there is not one of them whom I can trust where money is concerned. From my steward downwards they all rob me; and as they are most of them clever men, I very seldom find them out: and if I do find them out, I say nothing, for, save in the matter of money, they are good and faithful servants. Some five years ago I purchased from the Shah the right of working the celebrated turquoise-mines of Feroze Koh; these are a royal property, and the concession has always been a very valuable one. I placed it in the hands of one of my most trusted servants, a holy man, the Syud Gorum-sag; he is married to the second cousin of my third wife, and is therefore, in a way, my relative as well as my dependant. For the first two years the returns from the mines were satisfactory; then they began to drop. This year the mines do not pay their expenses; but the supply of turquoises in Teheran has in no way diminished, and all the turquoises, mark you, come from Feroze Koh:

two and two make four, Methuen Beg. Though the Syud Gorumsag is a holy man and, in a sort of way, my relative, I am reluctantly compelled to conclude that he is a thief. I have therefore obtained an order from the King to put him to the torture, and execute him if necessary; and I propose sending you to Feroze Koh, to do what is needful. You will be provided with proper *firman*s (orders from the Shah), and your expenses will be liberally paid. Go to Feroze Koh, Methuen Beg, burn his father, bring seven generations of his holy ancestors out of their graves, and upon all that you extract from him I will give you one-tenth as your reward and perquisite.'

" 'But, Highness,' I replied, 'how am I, as a foreigner, to carry out your instructions? The Syud is, as you say, a holy man; he has doubtless many friends at Feroze Koh: I have no official position, and the shearer might come back shorn, if he returned at all,' I added, drily.

" 'No official position!' cried the Itizad. 'Are you not Dentist-in-Ordinary to the Queen-mother? Are you not Lecturer on Chemistry in the Royal College of the King of Kings? Are you not my servant? Why, the mere fact of your being her Majesty's dentist

would render you capable of any atrocity in provincial eyes. You are a wise man, O Methuen Beg; no wise man ever neglects the opportunity of feathering his own nest: besides, you would be accompanied by a suitable retinue, a royal executioner, and twenty horsemen armed to the teeth.'

" 'That does make a difference,' I said.

" 'Of course it does,' said the Itizad. 'No one in Persia could doubt the official position of a man who was accompanied by a royal executioner. Why, accompanied by a royal executioner, you could take even *me* by the beard with impunity. Catch your fish by the tail when you've got the chance; opportunities don't come too often to us in this world that we should let them slip. My steward will give you a hundred *tomans*;¹ not that you will need any money for the road, because, of course, you'll pay nobody, and be a welcome guest everywhere — because you are accompanied by a royal executioner. There,' he said, dismissing me hurriedly, 'don't argue—I hate arguments. Take Hezekeeyeh with you: he's an expert in turquoises, and will be useful; but don't trust him. Come for your orders at dawn to-morrow, and see that you are ready to start at

¹ About fifty pounds.

noon. Execute your mission faithfully, and take from the unsainted Syud all he has but his shirt; you will leave him that, partly because he is a holy man, partly because he is my distant relative.'

"I had been long enough in Persia to know that there was nothing left for me to do but to bow and express my gratitude.

"I didn't half like the mission which had been confided to me: I didn't quite see how the putting to the torture and the executing of a holy man came within the scope of my duties as a Lecturer on Chemistry. But then I was the confidential servant of the Itizad-u-Sultaneh, and if I disobeyed him I should make a powerful enemy, and be probably dismissed from the Shah's service altogether. I had fully determined in my own mind that nothing should make me proceed to such painful extremities as those indicated by my master, the Itizad, against the holy man of Feroze Koh. Still, somebody had robbed the Itizad, and if I didn't accept the mission, doubtless some other person would be sent, who would probably both torture and execute the unfortunate Syud. Hezekeeyeh, on hearing of my mission, and that he was to accompany me, actually danced for very joy. 'A Syud, a holy man!' he cried; 'and you

a Christian, Methuen Beg, and I a Jew ! The Itizad has chosen rightly ; he'll get small mercy from us.'

" ' You forget yourself, Hezekeeyeh,' I replied. ' I go as the representative of the Law. Leave my presence at once.'

" ' In Persia the Law means sticks,' said the Jew laconically, as he left the room.

" I now received an almost affectionate note from Kelb Ali Khan, the Master of the Mint, my former chief, begging me to call upon him that night before I left, as he had something very particular to say to me. I did as he desired, and waited upon him about ten o'clock that night. The outer courtyard or men's apartments was one vast blaze of light ; the windows of the great *ūrūsi*¹ were thrown wide open, and the brilliantly lighted and gorgeous room within presented a scene of extraordinary disorder. It made rather an impression upon me, for I was shown into a small unlighted apartment opposite, and the Master of the Mint was unable to get away from his guests for some minutes : this gave me plenty of time to observe what was going on. At the head of the room, in his drawers, shirt, and *alkaluk*,²

¹ Lit., after the Russian pattern—i.e., foreign.

² *Alkaluk*, a thin quilted under-garment worn beneath the coat.

squatted on the ground, sat Kelb Ali Khan: he had taken off his sheepskin hat of ceremony, and wore only a little white skull-cap of embroidered linen; his face was very red indeed. Fruit and sweetmeats, with salted nuts, were arranged in trays upon the floor before the Khan and his eight guests. But they had evidently not met to eat sweetmeats, and in front of them was ranged a row of huge decanters of cut and gilded glass, which held pink, green, white, and red fluids; these were the strong coarse spirits of the vilest quality which are secretly manufactured by the Jews and Armenians for the delectation of their Mussulman customers. Among the guests I perceived the Chief of the Camel-artillery, and several others of the most notorious *kosh guzerani* or free-livers: there were also three parasites or cup-companions, in one of whom I recognised Hajji Nazir, the Itizad's head steward. The Chief of the Camel-artillery was engaged in filling the unfortunate man's mouth with sweetmeats the size of walnuts; of course the poor Nazir had to smile and take it as a compliment, and his distended cheeks and goggling eyes made him look sufficiently ridiculous. In each man's hand was a great silver skewer, upon which was stuck a half-devoured roast dove; the Master of the Mint was

beating time with his skewer, and shouting out the words of the last popular song in ridicule of the Queen-mother, while his friends were bellowing the chorus, the air of which was skilfully and loudly played by half-a-dozen ragged Jewish musicians in the courtyard below. The singers were all very red in the face from their exertions. Then I saw Kelb Ali Khan's servant enter the room, and whisper something in his master's ear; but, the Khan finished his song, and received a round of tumultuous applause from his guests. Then he got up and staggered from the room; he walked into the courtyard, squatted down at the edge of the *hauz*, or ornamental tank, and washed his hands and head with great deliberation; then he put on his coat of cashmere shawl, and his leathern girdle with the great jewelled buckle, stuck on his sheepskin hat very much awry, and marching unsteadily across the courtyard, walked into the unlighted room, at the open window of which I was sitting.

“ ‘O Methuen Beg! O my soul!’ he said, slapping me upon the shoulder familiarly, as he seated himself at my side; ‘O prince of chemists and most admirable of dentists! you are very welcome; you have conferred a great honour on my poor house by this visit: it is yours—I

make you a present of it. Methuen Beg, I have always looked upon you as a brother—always. Can I offer you anything? Now tell me,’ he cried, ‘soul of my soul, what’s all this about my wife’s relative? He’s a good fellow, the prince of good fellows, is the Syud Gorum-sag. Tell me all about it.’

“‘I am afraid I can give your Excellency no information,’ I replied, drily.

“‘Of course you can’t—quite right: faithful servant and all the rest of it, of course. But are you not my friend? Was not I the cause of your promotion? Didn’t I bring you to the notice of the Itizad, and get you your appointment at the College? O ingratitude, ingratitude!’ he cried, with great solemnity. ‘What is it the poet says about ingratitude? Ah,’ he added, with a deep sigh, ‘my memory isn’t what it was, Methuen Beg; I have entirely forgotten what the poet said about ingratitude. Look here, Methuen Beg,’ he went on, in a whisper, ‘listen to me. How much do you expect to make by this journey to Feroze Koh? How much has the old man promised you?’

“I didn’t answer him.

“‘Quite right; don’t commit yourself,’ he went on. ‘Let us say a hundred *tomans*,—a hundred *tomans* is

liberal: and of course you calculate on getting at least as much again out of the Syud; but you will find him a very hard nut to crack, Methuen Beg—you may even break your teeth in the attempt. Besides,' he added, 'he is very popular at Feroze Koh; you *might* meet with an accident, you *might* even be buried there; the Syud doesn't stick at trifles, I can tell you.'

"'I'll take my chance of that, your Excellency,' I said.

"'Well, then,' said the Khan, throwing his arm round my neck suddenly, 'O unmerciful one, O man without bowels of compassion, say how much?'

"And so he went on for full a quarter of an hour, trying alternately to wheedle, bribe, frighten, and cajole me; but all to no purpose, for I declined even to discuss the matter.

"'You could be ill,' he said; 'there is nothing easier than to be ill, and I'll make it worth your while. Shall we say two hundred and fifty *tomans*, which is more than you could possibly make out of the business?'

"Then I rose to go, for I felt that I could no longer keep my temper with the Khan.

"'And a Cashmere shawl, Methuen Beg, a beautiful Cashmere shawl, that you could sell in the bazaar for fifty

tomans?' Seeing that I was still obdurate, he laughed a little nervous laugh, and said, 'Well, if you won't you won't; we needn't quarrel about it. You won't tell the Itizad you've seen me, will you now? Promise me that.'

"I gave him the required pledge, at which he seemed considerably relieved.

" 'Ah, Methuen Beg,' he said wearily, as he dismissed me, 'you'll never, never get on in the Persian service, because you are but a triply-accented fool after all.'

"And then I took my leave, and Kelb Ali Khan returned to his friends, his potations, and his songs."

CHAPTER IX.

MY FATHER'S HISTORY CONTINUED.

"WE passed out of the Shah Abdul Azim gate at noon the next day. I was accompanied by twenty horsemen, all well armed and mounted, and I rode the handsome horse given me by the Itizad, for I felt that, upon this expedition, I was no longer a man of the pen but a man of the sword. By my side rode one of the Itizad's junior secretaries, who was placed at my disposal, while Hezekeeyeh the Jew, who felt perfectly safe under the protection of the Itizad's retainers, ambled along in the rear upon a mule with my servants. It was an eight days' journey to Feroze Koh, and it had been arranged that one of the King's assistant executioners was to ride out on post-horses and meet my party at the fourth stage. I and the young secretary messed together, for of course I insisted on his becoming my

guest. He beguiled the tedium of our marches by interminable stories of the scandals and intrigues of Teheran: he told me that the young King was entirely ruled by his ambitious mother, and that she, in her turn, did exactly as the son of the Sipah Salah, to whom she was secretly married, pleased. According to the Mirza, everybody in Teheran was busily engaged in feathering his own nest, and no one ever hesitated at the most atrocious crimes in attempting to effect that object.

“‘You, O my master,’ he would say, ‘have a glorious opportunity at present, for the royal *firman*s of which you are the bearer give you even the power of life and death; and, thanks be to Providence, the Syud Gorum-sag is a wealthy man, and there is no one to stand between him and the wrath of our master the Itizad, whose servant he is. But he will show a bold front at first, that you may depend upon; you will have to very seriously consider the question as to the amount it will be worth your while to take, before we cry quits with him. And now I have a proposition to make to you. If you should see fit to execute him, or carry him a prisoner to Teheran, I am prepared with a sum of two hundred *tomans* in hard cash, and a promissory note for an equal amount, if you will put me in as temporary director of

the turquoise - mines: you *must* appoint somebody, and I am offering you the full value of the billet, indeed I am,' he added, pleadingly.

"I was naturally incensed at the monstrous proposition of this plausible youth.

"‘If I hear another word on this subject from you, Mirza Nadūrūs,’ I said to him, ‘I will pack you back to Teheran at once, and hand you over to the tender mercies of the Itizad.’

"‘Oh no, you won’t, Methuen Beg,’ cried Mirza Nadūrūs, with a laugh; ‘you can’t do without me. Who is to manage your correspondence? Why, you cannot even read your own *firmans*.’

"I laughingly acknowledged that there was some truth in what he said.

"‘Besides,’ said the Mirza, ‘who is to act as your intermediary with the Syud? Certainly not the King’s executioner; he will be far too much occupied in filling his own purse. Of course *you* wouldn’t think of taking a bribe,’ he added, with a knowing wink; ‘but the Syud could arrange with you through *me*, and nobody would be any the wiser. There is one thing we shall have to beware of. The Syud is a holy man, as you know; the people of Feroze Koh are very much attached to

him, and you are unfortunately an infidel: he may succeed in getting up a riot, in which case we should all lose our lives. So if you do have to proceed to extremities with the Syud, and should see fit to torture or execute him, it will have to be done discreetly and secretly, and, of course, we must manage to lay the blame on the King and the executioner: we are merely the bearers of the Shah's *firman*, it is for the executioner to carry it out.'

"'You seem to have the interests of your master the Itizad very much at heart, Mirza Nadūrūs,' I said with a laugh.

"'When we get to Feroze Koh,' said the Mirza, 'we shall be exactly eight days' march from his Highness's palace; but of course, as good servants, we shall look after his interests as well as our own. Your Excellency will allow, I suppose, that a man's best friend is himself, and that he has no nearer relation than the man who wears his shirt?'

"I let him run on, for I found that it was no use to get angry with him; but I need hardly say that I was fully determined to continue to deserve the confidence of my kind old patron. Up to our fourth day's march I had insisted upon the whole party paying a fair price

for forage, food, and lodging at the villages at which we stopped ; but I was then joined by the King's executioner, who turned out to be a handsome young fellow, rather pretentious in his ways, but by no means an unpleasant travelling companion. He seemed inclined to at once take command of the expedition.

“ ‘ Put yourself in my hands, Methuen Beg,’ he said ; ‘ I am young in years, but old in experience, a man with a lion's heart, as becomes the profession I have chosen. I am perfectly ready to strangle fifty Syuds with their own girdles before breakfast, provided I hold the royal *firman* ; with the royal *firman* I should be prepared to operate gently but firmly upon the Prime Minister himself. What am I but an instrument ? I am the far-reaching sword of the King of kings,’ he added proudly ; ‘ it is for you to draw or sheathe that terrible weapon. As for the bastinado or the torture, I have studied these matters scientifically, under the most noted professors. Innumerable criminals have been blown from guns, walled up alive, or otherwise disposed of by me in the most ingenious and novel manner : there is a fashion, you know, even in executions,’ and then this handsome young man told me a succession of horrible stories which made my blood run cold ; but except for his professional

anecdotes, I found him, as I have said, a very pleasant companion.

“Next morning I was awakened by shouts and cries which came from the courtyard of the *ketkhoda* or headman of the village in whose house I was lodging. The villagers, to the number of some fifty or sixty, the greater part of whom were women and boys, were evidently both frightened and angry: the women shrieked and gesticulated loudly, calling upon God, Mohammed, the Shah, and the Itizad, clutching at the clothes and shaking their fists in the faces of four of my horsemen, who were engaged in slapping and cuffing, in a perfunctory sort of way, a bearded man, who, with his hands tied behind his back, was standing in front of Kanjar Beg, the young executioner, who sat upon a low brick platform, shouting, swearing, and yelling lustily.

“‘Mercy, mercy, O Prophet! may the graves of the forefathers of the oppressor be defiled! Accursed be the Itizad and seven generations of his ancestors! Who is this son of a burnt father who comes without orders to kill and torture us?’

“‘Strike him, beat him, kill him!’ cried the young executioner. ‘He has insulted the Shah’s executioner when on duty: he is worthy of death.’

"Then several of the women rushed to Kanjar Beg, kissed his hands and the hem of his long robe of gay shot silk, and cried for mercy in the most piteous tones.

"*'Ai-ee,'* shrieked the *kethhoda*, flinging himself upon the ground and rolling in the dust with many contortions; *'ai-ee,'* he repeated, 'I'm blinded, I'm deprived of sight. Will you men stand by and see me maltreated thus?'

"But the male villagers didn't come to his assistance; they merely leaned upon their iron-headed sticks, looking very sulky indeed, and occasionally raising a hand on high, as though to implore the assistance of Heaven.

"Kanjar Beg appeared perfectly unmoved: he sat upon the little brick platform, bolt upright, mimicking the favourite attitude of the Shah himself; he twirled and caressed his long moustache with one hand, while the other, which held a little wooden rosary, toyed with the tiny axe which was stuck in his girdle, and was his badge of office.

"*'Do you know, O man,'* he cried in a terrible voice, 'that you have committed high treason? Are you aware that, in refusing supplies to a royal officer upon urgent business, you have incurred the death penalty,—not an ordinary death penalty, mind you, but a fancy punish-

ment. Take him away!' he cried to the four horsemen, 'secure him in the stable. Praise God, I am a merciful man. In half an hour I will take off his right ear; in the mean time I give him the pleasures of anticipation.' Then he drew a little curved dagger from his girdle, and began to feel its edge in a highly professional manner. 'Bring me a pipe,' he said, 'and see that it be properly filled and smokable, and that the tobacco be of the very best.'

"The *ketkhoda's* son, a handsome boy of fifteen, ran into the house, and presently returned with a *kalian* or water-pipe, the bowl and reservoir of which were of silver. This Kanjar Beg proceeded to gravely smoke with evident enjoyment. The elders among the villagers now began to converse in whispers excitedly. Five of them came into the house, and in a few moments more, with many bows and compliments, they entered my room and stood in a row in front of me.

"'What is it you want, O men?' I said, in a loud voice, and with great dignity.

"'May it please your Excellency,' replied the one of them who acted as spokesman, 'we have a petition. You, praise be to God, are a man of science and erudition. You arrived here, we treated you with becoming

respect; our *ketkhoda* placed his house at your disposal, and did his best to feed you and your servants according to your high rank; he emptied his own stable that your horses might be sheltered, and he neither expected nor wished for any fee or reward. He did all he could; had you been the Shah himself he could have done no more. All this he has done because you are in the service of the Queen-mother, and of his Highness the Itizad, and because you are the bearer of a royal *firman*. You, in your mercy and consideration, inform us that you can only stay a single day here, a fact which is very painful to our feelings, for it would give us intense pleasure to feed you, your horses, and your retinue, for an entire year. Then arrives that son of an unsainted mother whom you see below: he summons Gunge Ali, the head of our village, into his presence, and makes the most preposterous demands; he tells us that his retinue is behind, that it consists of ten horsemen, and that he and they are to be quartered upon us for an entire month. Ten men at two *kerans* a-day are twenty *kerans*, he says; his own accommodation he rates at ten *kerans*: a month at thirty *kerans* a-day, nine hundred *kerans*. "Give me the half of that," he says to our *ketkhoda*, "and I and my retinue will stay at the next

village instead of coming to you." How can a man who has travelled post have a retinue? The ten horsemen only exist in his imagination; and now he declares that unless our *kotkhoda* pays up the four hundred and fifty *kerans* at once, he'll cut off his right ear. A royal executioner, Excellency, is capable of any atrocity. You are our only refuge, O protector of the poor!'

"Then they all threw themselves upon their knees, and repeated in a sort of chorus, 'You are our only refuge, O protector of the poor!'

" 'Methuen Beg,' whispered Mirza Nadūrūs in my ear, 'I shouldn't interfere if I were you. He's bound to give you half the plunder, and if there should be any subsequent unpleasantness, it will be his affair, and not yours: he is merely the cat who takes the hot chestnuts, you are the monkey, and if anybody's paw is singed, it's the cat's, and not the monkey's. Nothing can be better at the present moment than a policy of masterly inactivity. O shameless ones,' he cried, addressing the villagers, 'quit the apartment at once; can you not see that his Excellency is desirous of sleeping? He disdains to mix himself up in your miserable squabbles. The bearer of the royal *firman* cannot concern himself in such paltry matters. Fight it out with the King's

executioner. Not another word ; be off with you !' cried the Mirza.

"The unhappy villagers filed out without a word.

"'If,' said I, addressing the Mirza, 'Kanjari Beg resorts to any further violence to these poor people, you can tell him that I shall return to Teheran at once and report his conduct to the Itizad. What right has he to extort money in this disgraceful manner ?'

"'Why, it's his business !' cried the Mirza, in an astonished tone ; 'the more he takes from them, the greater will be the respect paid to you. How are the King's executioners to live if they don't levy black-mail ? Besides, how are we to make anything if he doesn't have a free hand ? Let me beg your Excellency to look at things in their proper light.'

"'You can order the horses to be saddled at once,' I said, shortly, 'and you can tell Kanjar Beg that it will depend upon his conduct whether I return immediately to Teheran or proceed to Feroze Koh. In the meantime send the *ketkhoda* here.'

"'But, your Excellency——' began the Mirza.

"'No more words, Mirza Nadūrūs !' I cried, losing my temper, 'or you may find yourself with your feet higher than your head.'

"This gentle hint as to the bastinado had its due effect upon the Mirza, who shouted my orders to the horsemen in the courtyard below. The *ketkhoda* was immediately dragged into my presence.

" 'Unbind the man's hands,' I cried. 'Be seated, Gunge Ali,' I continued, addressing him with great politeness, 'and you can at once furnish my Mirza with the bill for our night's lodging, which shall be immediately counted out to you.'

" 'I couldn't think of taking a farthing from your Excellency,' cried the old man, in pleased astonishment. 'What is the cost of a night's lodging compared with the value of an ear? You, *Mashallah*, O Excellency, are more generous than Hatim Tai, more just than Shah Abbas himself. You are my guest; nothing would induce me to touch your money, O protector of the poor!'

"But I insisted, and the *ketkhoda*, after many protestations, consented to receive his out-of-pocket expenses, with a small present for himself. We started within the hour, Kanjar Beg appearing excessively sulky and lost in thought. I found out afterwards that Mirza Nadūrūs had succeeded in wheedling the *ketkhoda* out of his silver *kalian*, on the ground that my conduct had been produced by his disinterested intercession.

“Incidents such as the one I have described were of frequent occurrence during the journey to Feroze Koh ; even Hezekeeyeh the Jew, who was intrusted with the commissariat arrangement, demanded a fowl when he required an egg, and when he needed a lamb asked for a sheep. These petty extortions I was unable to prevent, and it was only incidentally that they came to my knowledge, for the poor villagers never complained, and after the incident with the *ketkhoda*, the whole neighbourhood rang with the praise of my mercy and justice. On our last day's march the Syud Gorumsag came out with the notables of the place to meet me : he was a swarthy-looking man of fifty, well but plainly dressed, and mounted on a magnificent mule. After paying me a long string of compliments, he expressed his delight at my arrival.

“‘Your Excellency will find everything in order,’ he said ; ‘the labour accounts are heavy, but they are supported by proper vouchers. This year's crop of turquoises is not what I could have wished, and there is a serious diminution in the quantity of larger stones : these questions, however, we will, if your Excellency pleases, go into to-morrow. I have prepared a house for you, which I trust you will find sufficiently comfortable. I

cannot receive you into my own place, being, as you know, a descendant of the Prophet, God bless and save him! I have even,' he added in a whisper, 'caused a large supply of the sweetmeats¹ in which the inhabitants of Feringhistan so much delight to be placed in your own room. The King's executioner will of course lodge with you, and I hope that your presence will be some check upon the insolence for which such men are notorious. I have no doubt of succeeding in convincing you of my perfect honesty and good faith, and,' he added in a lower tone, 'the cogent reasons I shall advance when we are alone will be *weighty* ones. An honest man,' he added, speaking in a very loud voice, so that all around might hear, 'does not fear investigation—he courts it.' Just then his eye fell upon Kanjar Beg; he shuddered involuntarily, and began to run the beads of his rosary through his fingers, and to mutter prayers under his breath.

"‘Mirza Nadūrūs will go into the accounts,' I said; 'that is his business.'

"‘Your secretary,' remarked the Syud politely, with a bow to him, 'seems a most intelligent young man; that's a sorry beast he's riding, though,' he added: 'we must

¹ A euphuism for wines and spirits.

find him a better mount before he leaves Feroze Koh.' Then he saluted the King's executioner, and inquired most anxiously after his health. Then he introduced me to the notables of the place, and every one of the party vied with each other in paying us the most extravagant compliments.

"A most comfortable and convenient house was placed at my disposal. The owner had been simply turned out; his stock of corn for the horses was not even under lock and key; there was a plentiful supply of fuel in the great kitchen; and all I had to do was to have my travelling carpets laid upon the matted floors, and to make myself thoroughly at home. The master of the house hung about the place a little anxiously, for, in Persia, Government guests do as much damage as possible. I took possession of the principal room in the house as my hall of audience or reception-room, while in a little chamber adjoining it I caused my bedding to be laid. Kanjar Beg and my secretary, with the chief of the Itizad's horsemen, took up their quarters at the other side of the courtyard, and messed together.

"During the march to Feroze Koh, two of my horsemen had volunteered as servants: the first was one

Suleiman Beg, a bearded man past middle age, of ferocious appearance.

“‘I wish to be your Excellency’s *nazir* or steward, may I be your sacrifice,’ this man had said, introducing himself.

“‘I am afraid there is nothing to look after, Suleiman Beg,’ I replied.

“‘Your Excellency,’ said the man, ‘please God, there soon will be. Why, your Excellency will receive hundreds of petitions as soon as you get to Feroze Koh: you don’t want to have to read them yourself, and you don’t want to have to reply to them.’

“‘That will be the duty of Mirza Nadūrūs, my secretary,’ said I.

“‘O Excellency,’ replied Suleiman Beg, ‘Mirza Nadūrūs will have his hands quite full with the matter of the turquoise-mines. Believe me, Excellency,’ he added, ‘the Syud Gorumsag will find occupation enough and to spare for your Excellency, your secretary, and the royal executioner. Besides, somebody must stand before you in a long cloak for decency’s sake. I am the only man of the party who possesses a long cloth cloak, therefore I am the proper person to stand before your Excellency; besides, Excellency, I don’t require pay.’

“It seemed a strange sort of arrangement, but I yielded; and in the same way I appointed one Ismail Beg my body-servant. I had been long enough in the country to know that both these men would manage to pay themselves; and I was anxious to shake off Heze-keeyeh the Jew, and to keep him as much as possible in his place, merely availing myself of his technical knowledge of the value of turquoises, should I require it.

“When I woke from the nap which I was glad to take immediately upon my arrival, I hardly recognised Suleiman Beg. In the first place, his costume had been altogether changed: instead of the close-fitting brown felt skull-cap, he wore a peculiarly tall hat of curled sheep-skin; his patched garments of quilted chintz, his capacious baggy breeches, and big riding-boots, were replaced by a *barani* or cloak with long sleeves, a coat of Kerman shawl lined with foxes' skins, and a pair of green shagreen slippers,—while a broad muslin girdle, in which appeared a pen-case and a roll of paper, had superseded the ragged shawl which had been wound round his waist upon the road, and into which had been stuck quite an armoury of dirks, knives, and pistols. He was absolutely unarmed, and he leant upon a stick of varnished orange-wood some four feet long. He who had

been a man of the sword was now a man of the pen; his grisly beard had been dyed a jetty black, and the grey eyebrows and lashes had been stained a mahogany brown colour. There he stood, leaning on his stick by the side of my mattress, assuming as a matter of course the exact attitude of the Prime Minister himself when standing in the presence of the King of kings.

“He made me a low salaam. ‘I trust that his Excellency’s slumbers have been pleasant,’ he said, respectfully. ‘The Syud Gorumsag—may he grill in everlasting fires!—has had the insolence to send a miserable repast for his Excellency’s service. It was a dinner for six. I informed him that, while travelling, his Excellency might sit down, considering the poverty of the country, to a dinner for twelve; and a dinner for twelve will arrive almost immediately.’

“‘But how can I manage to eat a dinner for twelve, Suleiman Beg?’ I asked with a laugh.

“‘The appetite of an official personage,’ said my steward, ‘varies according to his position. When you have finished with the meal, for of course you will eat alone now, the trays will go to the King’s executioner and Mirza Nadūrūs: they will then pass on to me, who am your sacrifice, and Ismail Beg, your Excellency’s

principal body-servant; your Excellency's body-guard, being eighteen in number, will make very short work of the remainder. I know my countrymen, Methuen Beg; and had I accepted anything less from the Syud than a dinner for twelve persons, you would have been looked upon by him as an official of no account. I had to think of your dignity, and to remember that here you represent my master the Itizad, while you must not forget, Excellency, that you, as the bearer of the King's *firman*, are the vicegerent of the Shah himself.'

"The dinner for twelve duly arrived, with a very polite message from the Syud, informing me that he desired a secret interview an hour after midnight. This I granted, and the Syud was duly ushered into my presence by Suleiman Beg with the utmost secrecy. We paid each other a number of empty compliments, and then the Syud came to business.

"‘Sahib,’ he said, ‘my beard is in your hand; you can cause me considerable trouble. I know that you are the bearer of the king's *firman*, and the letters I have lately received from my patron, his Highness the Itizad, have not been reassuring; but your Excellency cannot get blood out of a stone. My stables are empty;

I have sent my women away to the houses of friends ; and were it not that I were conscious of being the most innocent of men, I would have fled myself.'

" ' Doubtless, doubtless,' I replied soothingly. ' I have the highest respect for you, O Syud. Possibly the mines have ceased to be productive ; it may be so, who can tell ? We will go into that matter in the morning. But do not deceive yourself, O Syud ; the King's executioner is a man without compassion, and the King's *firman* gives me full powers. As for your leaving this place, I shall not permit it. My master the Itizad considers that you have robbed him of at least thirty thousand *tomans*. Prove your innocence, and I have nothing more to say ; but if you fail to do so, you must pay the money, or you will be handed over to the mercies of the King's executioner, and what he is capable of you know a great deal better than I do.'

" For a while the Syud appeared lost in thought ; then he suddenly brightened up and remarked to me, ' I think you have not been very long in the Itizad's service, Methuen Beg. How much would it be worth your while to fly the country for ? It is but twelve marches to the Caspian Sea. Shall we say two thousand *tomans* ?'

“‘Do you know,’ I replied, ‘that I am Lecturer on Chemistry at the Royal College of Teheran, and Dentist-in-Ordinary to the Queen-mother?’

“‘I’ll make it three,’ said the Syud.

“I shook my head.

“‘Four,’ he said, with a sigh.

“And step by step he gradually rose in his offers, till he reached the sum of ten thousand *tomans*. But still I shook my head, amiably but firmly.

“‘Ten thousand *tomans*,’ said the Syud, ‘is the utmost amount that I can raise, and to do so I must mortgage all I have in the world, and sell even the clothes and jewellery of my women.’

“‘Your story doesn’t hold water, O man,’ I replied. ‘Why should you give me ten thousand *tomans*, when you know very well that, in a month’s time, another emissary from the Itizad would arrive with positive orders for your execution. The very fact of your offering such a sum proves your guilt, to my mind. Don’t drive me to extremities; you have had the thirty thousand *tomans*, and I shall not return to Teheran without them.’

“‘And how would it profit you even if you did?’ replied the Syud. ‘You would get a paltry gratuity, say

of five hundred *tomans*, from the Itizad, while I have offered you ten thousand.'

" 'Which shows me very plainly that you must have certainly stolen the thirty thousand to make it worth your while to do so.'

" 'I will speak the truth,' said the Syud. 'I have abstracted stones to that amount; but I have had to share with Kelb Ali Khan, the Master of the Mint, and ten thousand is the utmost amount that I can raise. I swear it to you by God and the Prophet,' he added solemnly.

" 'And suppose that, in the morning, I were to hand you over to the executioner as a thief by your own confession, what then?' I cried.

" 'If you were to do that,' said the Syud complacently, 'you and your whole party would probably be exterminated. I am very popular in Feroze Koh.'

" 'But you have confessed the thing,' I cried.

" 'But not before witnesses,' replied the Syud, with a smile.

"I didn't answer him, but I rose and drew back the silken curtain which hid the doorway leading into the larger apartment: there sat Mirza Nadūrūs and Kanjar Beg, while behind them stood Suleiman Beg, leaning on his stick and smiling blandly.

“‘You have tricked and cheated me!’ cried the Syud, springing to his feet. ‘Why have I defiled myself by sitting down in the presence of an Unbeliever? I might have known what to expect. But I’ll rouse the whole neighbourhood by morning,’ cried the furious man, ‘and then I wouldn’t give that for your lives,’ he cried, snapping his fingers in the air.

“‘You won’t do that,’ I said, ‘because you have fled to the shores of the Caspian. *Nobody knows that you are here*, and when the excitement of your disappearance has blown over, I will carry you secretly as a prisoner to Teheran, and no one will be any the wiser. I begin to think that the Itizad will get his money.’

“Quietly and silently we hurried him into a small granary, which was secured by a strong door, and there we bound his hands and left him to his own reflections. The next morning the whole neighbourhood rang with the news that Syud Gorumsag had fled. I immediately proceeded to take possession of his belongings in the name of the King. Mirza Nadūrūs and the King’s executioner were very busy indeed; while to make assurance doubly sure I despatched three of my horsemen in the direction of the Caspian, with orders to bring in the supposed fugitive dead or alive.

“And now the notables of the neighbourhood all waited upon me; every one had some tale to tell against the man who had run away. Several of his friends produced large sums which had been left with them by him for security, and which they were only too glad to hand over in exchange for my official receipt. Before night nearly fifteen thousand *tomans* had come into my possession in this manner. The next morning, to my horror, a horseman arrived, post from Teheran, with a private letter from the Itizad, which ran as follows:—

“‘To our faithful servant Methuen Beg, he who sits in the presence of princes. By this time you will have doubtless severely bastinadoed the Syud Gorumsag, and put him to the torture. His defalcations are more than I imagined; but the Master of the Mint has paid up twenty thousand *tomans*, and I have cast him into my private prison. Take all you can get from the Syud. When you have got everything, cause him to be executed privately, for which I enclose a royal warrant. Kanjar Beg will arrange it: of course he must be supposed to have committed suicide. I think you had better leave the place at once, so that the discovery of the holy man’s death may be only made when you are well out of reach.’

"This letter completely upset me. I did not consider that it came within my duties, either as Lecturer on Chemistry or as Dentist to the Queen-mother, to murder the Syud Gorumsag, for that was what it amounted to. I took till the evening to think it over, and when night had fallen I visited the little granary in which my prisoner was confined.

"‘Man,’ I said to him, ‘you are to be executed at dawn,’ and I permitted him to read the warrant for his execution, to which the King’s seal was attached.

"‘Twenty thousand *tomans*,’ he said defiantly; ‘twenty thousand *tomans* in gold.’

"‘It is all very well,’ I replied; ‘but where will you find twenty thousand *tomans in gold*?’ I did not tell him that I was in possession of the large deposits he had made with his friends in Feroze Koh.

"‘Do you know anything of the value of turquoises?’ inquired the Syud.

"‘I have an expert with me,’ I replied.

"‘It is well,’ continued Syud Gorumsag; ‘but how am I to trust you? You are an *Isauvi*, a Christian, as are the Armenians. One may believe a Jew, if he will swear on his *Torat*;¹ but I wouldn’t

¹ *Torat*, the Jewish Pentateuch.

trust an Armenian, not if he swore by the Father of Pigs.'

" 'Syud Gorumsag,' I said, quietly, '*you must trust me*; there is no other way. You have seen the Itizad's orders, you have read the death-warrant: the good people of this place suppose that you are far on your way towards the Caspian; your execution can take place here quite quietly at dawn; my duty is merely to see that the thing is done. I ride out in the cool of the afternoon, and so escape reprisals from your friends, being well on my way to Teheran by morning. As for the King's executioner and the Itizad's horsemen, they are quite capable of taking care of themselves; but I am a poor man, and I do not wish to return to Teheran empty-handed. If you would rather die than trust me, that is your affair.'

" 'You don't mince matters,' replied the Syud. 'I suppose I must trust you. You will let me get clear away if I give you good value to twenty thousand *tomans* in turquoises, and you will let me keep the balance, the rest of the accursed stones that I have risked my life to obtain?' Drops of agony stood on the wretched man's face as he uttered the words.

"Then I went through a little piece of mental

arithmetic. I had got fifteen thousand *tomans* in hard cash; the Itizad had received another twenty thousand from the Master of the Mint; and twenty thousand more in turquoises made fifty-five thousand *tomans*.¹ the Itizad, my master, would be actually five thousand to the good.

“‘I agree. If you will put in my hands turquoises to the full value, I will release you immediately, and as for any remaining stones, they shall be yours.’

“‘Go to my house,’ said the Syud; ‘enter the little *namazkhana* (prayer-room or study). In the top right-hand corner of the room, at the very angle of the walls, six inches beneath the surface of the mud floor, you will find a small tin canister. There are more than thirty-six thousand *tomans*’ worth of the finest turquoises in it. My life and fortune are in your hands, O man, and may God be merciful unto you at the judgment-day as you are merciful to me!’ Then the poor wretch buried his face in his hands and wept aloud.

“I left him to his reflections, carefully locking the door of his prison-house, putting the key of the great padlock, which had never left me, in my pocket.

¹ About £18,000.

"The whole household was sunk in sleep; but I awakened old Suleiman Beg, and, taking a paper lantern, we proceeded to the residence of the holy man, which was only a few yards from our own quarters.

"'Suleiman Beg,' I said, as we entered the deserted place, which had been thoroughly stripped by the royal executioner, 'you are a faithful servant of the Itizad, and you can keep your tongue between your teeth?'

"'I am his Excellency's sacrifice,' replied the old man, simply. 'I have seen many strange things in his service. I was born in his house, and everything I have in the world I owe to him. What more can I say?'

"'It is enough,' I replied.

"I found the canister in the place indicated by the Syud, and we returned at once to my quarters.

"'Bring hither the Jew,' I said.

"In a few minutes Hezekeeyeh stood before me, bowing profoundly. While I was alone I emptied the contents of the canister into my pocket-handkerchief; it consisted of a little heap of turquoises, of the very largest size and finest quality. I divided them into four equal portions, knotting each lot into a separate corner of the handkerchief.

“‘Sit, Jew,’ I said, addressing Hezekeeyeh, and displaying the gems contained in one corner of the handkerchief to his astonished gaze. ‘Value me these stones, and see that you make no mistake.’

“‘Have you found the lost treasure of Darius?’ cried the Jew, raising his hands in astonishment, ‘or has the treasury of Jemshid come into your possession?’

“‘Be silent,’ I said, ‘and value the stones at their just market price!’

“Hezekeeyeh whipped out a magnifying-glass and a pair of pocket-scales: he weighed the gems separately and then together; then he made a calculation on a piece of paper. ‘There is good value here for eight thousand *tomans*,’ he said.

“‘Be careful, Jew; let there be no mistake.’

“‘I will give you eight thousand *tomans* for them,’ said the Jew, simply.

“I unknotted a second corner of the handkerchief; the stones it contained he valued at six thousand *tomans*; the third parcel was estimated by him at the same amount.

“‘You are quite sure that there are twenty thousand *tomans*’ worth of turquoises there?’ I said, pointing to the little heap.

“‘I will sell them for that amount in the bazaar for your Excellency as soon as we get to Teheran,’ he replied. ‘Shall I not value the rest for your Excellency?’ said the Jew.

“‘There are no others,’ I replied, calmly, as I thrust the handkerchief into my bosom; but I felt that the rattle of the stones had betrayed me to Hezekeeyeh, and as I turned my head I saw a face, the face of some one who was standing in the courtyard without, pressed against the window-pane. I knew that it must be Mirza Nadūrūs: he had evidently been a witness to the whole business.

“I began to feel very uncomfortable indeed. Then I dismissed the Jew.

“I now felt that I must confide in Suleiman Beg.

“‘You are aware,’ I began, ‘that Syud Gorumsag fled last night?’

“The old man smiled and nodded.

“‘You also know that he is imprisoned in the granary?’

“Suleiman Beg nodded once more.

“‘I have obtained these turquoises on a promise to set him free. I must keep that promise, Suleiman

“‘It is not good that the holy man should die,’ he said, with a smile.

“‘But I must not know of his escape,’ I continued.

“‘We must not know of his escape,’ echoed Suleiman Beg.

“‘It would be just as well to see that he is safe,’ I went on.

“‘Just as well,’ echoed the old man.

“‘Let us visit him,’ I said.

“He took the light and I followed him, and we proceeded at once to the granary. I unlocked the great padlock, and I entered the place, followed by Suleiman Beg.

“‘It is my duty to inform you, O Aga Gorumsag,’ I said formally, ‘that you will be executed at break of day.’

“The man’s eyes seemed almost to start from his head as I made this terrible announcement. Then I thrust the handkerchief into his hand.

“‘Go,’ I said, in a whisper,—‘go while you have the chance. Suleiman Beg,’ I cried excitedly, ‘is that a scorpion?’ and I pointed to a black spot upon the wall above our heads.

“Suleiman Beg raised the light and gazed intently at the spot. ‘It is nothing, Sahib,’ he said; ‘it is nothing.’ •

"Then we both marched out; we replaced the great padlock upon the door, and locked it carefully: of course the bird had flown.

"'Arouse Ismail,' I said; 'have three horses ready: I will be off at once.'

"By morning I knew that matters at Feroze Koh would become exceedingly critical. I had fifteen thousand *tomans* in bills, and twenty thousand *tomans*' worth of turquoises secured about my person, and I hastily donned my travelling costume. In a few minutes Suleiman Beg, armed to the teeth, and looking as great a desperado as one could wish to meet in a day's march, entered my room.

"'Excellency, everything is prepared,' he said.

"I bade him summon the King's executioner and Mirza Nadūrūs. When they entered the room I could see that the former was more asleep than awake; he had evidently been drinking freely.

"'Kanjari Beg,' I said, 'be seated.'

"The royal executioner did as he was directed, and blinked at me like an owl. I extended a similar invitation to the secretary.

"'And now listen to my private instructions,' I began. 'You, O Kanjar Beg, are a man of blood. Here is the

royal warrant for the execution of our captive; there must be no scandal, you understand me ?'

" 'I understand,' he replied, with a half-drunken wink, — 'a cup of coffee; and if he won't take the coffee, it's a very simple matter,' and he took from his bosom a small coil of red silk cord. 'Better men than he have climbed into heaven by means of a rope.'

" 'He is to die at dawn,' I said, very solemnly; 'you will not disturb him until then, I hope.'

" 'On my eyes be it,' said the King's executioner.

" Then I handed him the royal warrant for the execution of the holy man, and the key of the granary.

" 'And now,' I said, 'as a European, it would not be safe for me to remain here. I shall march on quietly to the next stage with Suleiman Beg and one other of the Itizad's servants: you can join me there. Above all things, remember, no scandal, and, if possible, no tumult.'

" 'Look upon it as done,' said the executioner.

" 'A word in private with your Excellency,' said the secretary as I rose.

" 'Keep it till we meet at the first stage, Mirza Nadūrūs,' I exclaimed.

" And then I and my two attendants mounted, and rode slowly through the little straggling town of Feroze

Koh. As soon as we were in the open, we started off at a hand-gallop. In eight hours our worn-out beasts tottered into the posthouse of Kerimabad; there we obtained post-horses, and by dint of hard riding we did the nine stages to the capital in twenty hours. Then just as I was, covered with dust and mud, I demanded an audience of the Itizad. The old nobleman received me in the Hall of a Thousand and One Miracles. My patron, the Itizad, was evidently in a very bad temper.

“‘Is this your service?’ he cried. ‘A pretty cat you turn out to be, when you let the mouse slip through your claws. The accursed Syud is by this time in Russia, and you return empty-handed, while I am out of pocket fifty thousand *tomans*, which I have to make good to the King, my master. How much did he bribe you with, Methuen Beg?’

“The crowd of servants, secretaries, and parasites by whom he was surrounded were evidently delighted at my supposed discomfiture.

“‘If you will request your attendants to retire, Excellency, I will explain.’

“‘I don’t want explanations—I want money!’ cried the old man furiously, exhibiting in his rage the double row of diamonds with which his mouth was decorated;

and then he dismissed his dependants with an angry gesture.

“‘Sit,’ he said, impatiently.

“‘May it please your Excellency,’ I said in a low whisper, doing as I was bid, ‘here are some of the turquoises of which you have been defrauded; they have been valued by an expert at twenty thousand *tomans*. Here is another fifteen thousand *tomans*,’ I continued, producing the papers, ‘in good bills. I have done my best in the service of your Excellency, as your faithful servant Suleiman Beg can testify. As to bribes, you can have me searched if you like; you will find nothing but the unexpended balance of the sum given to me for travelling expenses.’

“‘Your face is whitened, O Methuen Beg,’ cried the old man, in astonishment and delight. ‘Keep the balance of the expenses; it is yours. My treasurer shall bring you five hundred *tomans* as a reward. No thanks,’ he added, good-naturedly, ‘you have deserved it. So the Syud has escaped, has he? Well, so much the better for him, so much the worse for the King, my master, upon whom the loss will fall. Ah,’ he added, very piously, as he began to finger his rosary, ‘the ways of Providence are very wonderful. I shouldn’t

like to be inside Kanjar Beg's skin when he comes into the royal presence.'

"And so the Shah of Persia was robbed by the Syud Gorumsag, and I was the innocent means of putting thirty-five thousand *tomans* into the pocket of the Itizad-u-Sultaneh.

"I only heard very vaguely what happened at Feroze Koh after my departure. In the morning, when it was found that the bird had flown, Mirza Nadūrūs bastinadoed Hezekeeyeh the Jew without mercy. In the afternoon, Kanjar Beg, feeling certain that he had been tricked in some way by the astute Mirza, bastinadoed him; then, being afraid to return to Teheran, he started nominally in pursuit of the ex-director of the turquoise-mines, and then, like a wise man, fled across the Russian frontier."

CHAPTER X.

I MEET MY STEPMOTHER.

It was in the cool of the next afternoon that we left the caravanserai of Chenar Rahdar, starting upon our last short stage of eight miles into Shiraz, which is the capital of Southern Persia. I had been promoted from the *kajawas*, for my stepmother had sent me her own private horse-litter, which consisted of a gaily ornamented box, some seven feet long, three feet high, and three feet wide: to the bottom of this were affixed two long springy poles of lance-wood, which projected before and behind, and were utilised as shafts, to which a pair of gaily caparisoned ambling mules were harnessed. A young black boy, smartly dressed, and who strutted about with a consequential air, and who was, as my father informed me, my stepmother's slave, was in charge of the machine. My father was evidently greatly

pleased when he saw the horse-litter: he rubbed his hands and chuckled. "I never expected it, Madge," he cried; "and there is not one of the ladies in Shiraz to whom she would lend it—no, not one," he added proudly, "for she holds her head high, as she has a right to do, does your stepmother. It's a great compliment, my dear, and she means well by you; I do hope you'll try and deserve her consideration."

It had long ago become very evident to me that my father was rather afraid of the Princess whom he had married, for he was continually inculcating the propriety of my "hitting it off with her," as he put it.

When we had got through the first half of our two hours' journey into the town, we were met by a little party of *lutis* or buffoons; two of them were leading big baboons and singing at the full pitch of their voices, and ever and anon the baboons would turn somersaults at the word of command: there was also a man playing upon a huge leathern drum; a flute-player, and a performer upon a sort of double clarinet, which, horrible to relate, was blown through the nostrils, and produced a monotonous buzzing sound like a hurdygurdy. As our cavalcade passed along, these people drew up in a line at the side of the road, and as my father advanced, the

singing became louder and the dancing faster, while the unfortunate baboons were compelled to execute a long and uninterrupted series of somersaults. When he arrived opposite to them, the singing ceased, and the buffoons made a series of low bows in unison: then they all rushed upon my father, evidently congratulating him upon his safe arrival; they kissed his stirrup, they kissed the hem of his flowing cloak, and then each man began to execute a sort of *pas de joie* in the middle of the road. Then my father flung them a handful of silver money, and then they marched along for the rest of the way in front of his horse, singing and playing what I learned afterwards was a special song composed in his honour. All this I saw from the little square windows of the closed horse-litter, through which one could look in every direction without being seen. As we neared the town, numerous horsemen, followed by gaily dressed mounted servants, joined the cavalcade, and each one saluted my father and congratulated him on his arrival. Everybody was dressed in the gayest colours, and everybody laughed and smiled, and seemed particularly well satisfied with the world in general and himself in particular. There was a great handing about of gold and silver water-pipes; but the smoking did not

hinder our progress, for we continued to plod along at the regulation four miles an hour. As my horse-litter passed under the great frowning fortified gateway of the town, I should think it must have been followed by a throng of a hundred horsemen, and as soon as we had entered the place, I noticed that many among the foot-passengers made low bows to my father, and then immediately joined the procession. And now the horse-litter turned down a narrow lane, and it was as much as Rejab and the black boy could do to steer it between the narrow walls through the thick crowd, and at last we stopped at a great arched doorway. All the maimed, the halt, and the blind of the place seemed to be collected here; from their extraordinary conduct they appeared to me to be mad as well as afflicted, for they jumped, shouted, and pushed and beat each other continuously, screaming blessings, and such phrases as these, "May I be the sacrifice of Methuen Beg!" "May I be the sacrifice of the little lady!" &c., &c. And then somebody began throwing down copper money from the roof of the house, which was furiously scrambled for by the beggars, amidst the shouts and laughter of the crowd of bystanders: and then my father managed to get through the crowd which blocked the narrow street, and

he dismounted, and whispering, "Keep your veil tightly down, child," lifted me out of the horse-litter; and old Nanna Rejab clutched me by the wrist, and made me step over the body of a sheep which had just been slaughtered in my father's honour at the threshold, and passing through a dark passage, we entered a little courtyard, cool and shady, sprinkled, swept, and garnished. Several women-servants were standing about, their hands respectfully crossed upon their bosoms: there was a small ornamental tank with a little fountain playing in it at the end of the courtyard, and a beautiful room raised a few feet from the ground behind it. At the window sat a Persian lady, beautifully dressed, and wearing a quantity of valuable jewellery. Nanna Rejab stopped, and made a series of very humble obeisances to the lady.

"Is this the master's daughter, Nanna Rejab?" said my stepmother. "She is very welcome," she continued, in a cold measured tone, without giving the old woman time to answer.

And then I walked up the steps which led to the beautiful room, and, the silken curtain being raised by a black girl, I slipped off my shoes and entered it; and remaining near the door in great humility, as I had been

previously instructed by my father to do, I made a single low bow.

“Be seated, child,” said the lady, who did not budge from the upper corner of the room near the window, where she lolled upon a carpeted mattress against a heap of brightly embroidered silken cushions, as she indicated to me a spot some three yards distant from her own seat. As I did so, I looked at her for the first time, and perceived that she was exceedingly handsome; till then I had merely noticed that she was magnificently dressed. And now the black girl helped me off with my veils, and the great outer baggy garment which has been previously described. Directly she saw my face, the lady rose to her feet excitedly, praised God in a loud voice, seized me by both hands, and kissed me affectionately.

“My darling! my lamb! my heart!” she cried. “Why, you are more than good-looking, you are actually beautiful, my rosebud. Your feet have been indeed fortunate, Nanna Rejab,” she cried. “Ah,” she added, gazing at me affectionately as she held me at arm’s-length, “you won’t stay long in Shiraz, my dear: I foresee a great, great future for you,” and she smothered me again with kisses, and insisted on my taking my seat upon the foot of the mattress, which was, as I afterwards learned,

the very highest honour she could pay me. And then she ran off a long string of compliments, plying me with sweetmeats the while. Of course I understood very little, but she was evidently pleased with me.

It may be wondered why my father was not present to make us mutually acquainted; but the fact was that he was entertaining the gentlemen who had done him the honour of riding out to meet him—a ceremony which is very dear to the heart of every Persian, and is termed an *istikbal*—in the other court-yard. My father had never been tired of dilating to me upon the subject of form, ceremony, and etiquette in Persia. To be a master of etiquette is a sign of a good education, and at first, I must confess, I could make but little of the elaborate ceremonials used in the course of everyday life. For instance, by standing where I did, I showed respect to my stepmother, the Princess. Had my father presented himself in his own women's quarters before he had been requested to do so, it would have been a terrible lapse. When one pays a visit, one takes one's seat in feigned humility, below the place to which one is entitled, on the "He-that-humbleth-himself-shall-be-exalted" principle, and then the hostess begs one to move up higher. And when one wishes to retire at the end of one's call,

one asks for *permission* to do so; and if one's hostess wishes to show particular courtesy, this permission is temporarily refused. An insult or a courtesy can be rendered by a gesture, and compliments which mean nothing are bandied profusely.

My stepmother's *kalian* or water-pipe was now brought: the head of the pipe was of pure gold, beautifully enamelled in gorgeous colours, with representations of beautiful youths and maidens, birds, flowers, fruit, and foliage; the lower portion of the pipe was covered with little turquoises, set so close together that one could hardly see the silver in which they were sunk, and the thing looked like an immense ostrich-egg of a bright blue colour. My stepmother offered me the pipe with her own hand; she did not smoke it first, she offered it to me: this is the highest compliment that a Persian lady in her position could pay. I took the pipe, but I did not smoke it; I rose and kissed her hand, and presented it to her. She gravely smoked it for a while, and she handed it back to me. There were tears in her handsome eyes as she did so. Then I passed the beautiful pipe to old Nanna Rejab, who removed it; and now my stepmother sprang to her feet and kissed me fervently.

"Ah, darling," she said, "I have no children of my own," and then she sighed; "but you are my daughter now, heart of my heart, soul of my soul—for your father's sake," and she led me to the mattress, and we sat down side by side, and she flung her arm round me; and then she kissed me again, and slipping a heavy gold bracelet from her wrist, placed it on mine; and we chatted together merrily, she laughing the while like a child at my broken Persian.

I felt that I had found a friend.

In an hour or two the noise of music from the men's courtyard, which had been continuous till then, ceased; and my father, having previously asked permission to present himself, made his appearance. He came to the open window and made a low bow.

"Come in, come in, Methuen Beg," said my stepmother. "I am your sacrifice. You are very welcome."

And then my father came into the room, and my stepmother, without rising, held out her plump and pretty hand, and my father kissed the hand very respectfully, and seated himself upon the carpet at the foot of the mattress. You see my stepmother was a princess; but I could perceive, notwithstanding all the ceremony which these two observed, that they were very

fond of each other. Then my stepmother, still holding my hand, made my father a long speech, during which he frequently smiled and bowed; and then the Princess kissed me again, and my father said, "My wife adopts you, Madge, and she is a good woman. You may trust her, dear; I owe everything I have in the world to her, even my life."

I need hardly say that I was overjoyed, for I had dreaded the introduction to my stepmother, and I had never imagined that she would be so nice, so pretty, and so kind, and, above all, so young.

We three dined together in the women's quarters, or *anderün*,¹ as they are called, that place where no man but my father might show his face, and which till now I had fancied must resemble something between a nunnery and a prison. My stepmother herself conducted me to my bedroom. The carpets, which form the furniture of a Persian room, were new and handsome; the mattress and pillows were of bright-coloured silk; and there was a quilt of scarlet satin gaily adorned with spangles. Vases of fresh flowers stood in the recesses in the walls, and a tray of sweetmeats was placed by the side of the mattress. I felt that I had found a real home at last.

¹ The harem or women's quarters.

And old Nanna Rejab helped me to undress, and then brought her own bedding, which she laid across the doorway, and curled herself up there as though she had been a watch-dog.

I was delighted to have reached my journey's end, and soon dropped off to sleep after my exciting day.

My home-life seemed very strange at first to me, and it was some time before the novelty wore off. Before long I had quite a large circle of acquaintances. With the exception of my father, his confidential man Rejab, and the black boy Feroze, my stepmother's servant, I never saw a man's face save through the perforations of my veil. I found it very easy to do without male society. I very soon picked up enough Persian to speak it pretty fluently, and day by day I became, of course, better versed in the language—and a language which has no irregular verbs is very easy to acquire. Our mornings were given up to housekeeping, our afternoons and evenings to amusement; a good deal of time was taken up in the paying and receiving of visits. Picnics and garden-parties, at which, of course, only ladies were present, were of very frequent occurrence, and to these entertainments our friends invariably brought their little ones of both sexes. Funny little beings were those

Persian children: little men and women, clad in silks and satins, and dressed as liliputian ladies and gentlemen; children who never "played," who seldom laughed or romped uproariously, but who were able to turn a delicate compliment like their elders, and whose only apparent weakness seemed to be an extraordinary affection for confectionery: they were like the little people of the story-books, who are always good. A Persian child never shows temper; if it cries, it is because it is in pain. And these wonderful children were very handsome, and though their hair was invariably dark, most of them had skins as fair as Europeans.

Among the Persian ladies, cooking, the making of confectionery, and the arts of the still-room are a favourite pursuit. All that we ate or drank was made at home. My stepmother was very proud of the delicious fruit syrups, the making of which she superintended with the utmost care. There was generally a grand jam-making once a-week, and jam-making in Persia is carried out on a large scale: some of the great china jars which we used as jam-pots held as much as five-and-twenty pounds. We made cucumber jam, for in Persia a cucumber is a fruit and not a vegetable, citron-jam, and delicious confections of apricots, cherries, and

the tiny plums of Bokhara. And we made pickles of grapes, of cherries, of green capsicums, of apples, and of almonds. In all these processes my stepmother was an expert, and to be a good housekeeper is a *sine qua non* with a Persian lady.

My father nearly always took his evening meal—dinner or supper, whichever you like to call it—with us in his women's quarters, and my stepmother would often, as a sign of her affection, confection delicious little dishes for his delectation with her own fair fingers; and papa invariably passed his evenings with us. My stepmother, who was an accomplished musician, according to oriental ideas, would play to him upon her harmonica, which consisted of a hollow flat frame of walnut-wood inlaid with ivory and ebony, on which were strung some fifty brass wires after the manner of a zither; these she struck with two little ivory sticks, and succeeded in producing delightful music. To this accompaniment she sang in a high soprano voice, and the songs were always love-songs, or long recitatives, in which were narrated the deeds of Persian heroes. Or she would play on a little lute called a *tarr*, trilling out romances, love-songs, or the last satirical ballad of the day. And my father and I would laugh and applaud, and at times feel in-

clined to cry, as we listened to her; and it was evident to me that my stepmother was a very clever musician, that she had a wonderful memory, and that she and my father were very, very fond of each other. And these little family amusements, as often as not, took place in the open air, upon the roof of my father's *anderūn*, where we sat in the clear moonlight to escape the heat, hidden from prying eyes by the low wall which surrounded the roof of the women's quarters of our great house, and maintained its privacy.

My stepmother was rather scandalised when I expressed a wish to see the rest of the house; but she laughingly consented, and sent orders to the hall-porter to close the great outer door. And then we put on outdoor costume, and donned our veils, lest the horrible degradation of being seen by our own servants might happen to us. Even Rejab, who was in some sense a privileged person, never entered the *anderūn* without permission, and, when he was admitted, always kept his eyes decorously fixed upon the ground: as for Feroze, the black slave, being a boy and a slave, nobody took any account of him; but the other house-servants never even showed their noses.

The door of communication was unbarred, the canvas

curtain was raised with great ceremony by Feroze, who shouted out loudly, "Take care! the lady Princess and the little lady are about to arrive." And then my stepmother, Nanna Rejab, and I, all closely veiled, entered the *berūni*, or men's courtyard. My father, who stood ready to receive us, looking very solemn indeed, made my stepmother a succession of low bows, and then proceeded to walk respectfully behind us, as though he had been our head-servant instead of the master of the house; while the numerous servants all stood perfectly still and looked at the tips of their toes.

The immense courtyard looked bare and uncomfortable: the whole place seemed in a semi-ruinous condition, and much in need of repair; the great ornamental tank leaked badly; the very pavement was uneven. In the two great sunken beds, which ran down the centre of the courtyard, there were only a few old orange-trees, and no flowers; even the great room, with its long row of windows of coloured glass, where my father transacted business and received his guests, was shabby, out of repair, and badly carpeted with well-worn rugs, which had lost their freshness years ago: the place looked bare, miserable, and poverty-stricken. I expressed my surprise to my father.

"There is reason in the roasting of eggs, Madge," he said, with a smile. "In this country no man cares to appear to be well off: once a man is suspected of wealth, he renders himself a mark for oppression. I am fairly safe, simply because I am a European, and the English Ambassador would protect me. But one never knows what may happen; besides, it is the custom of the country, and in Persia a wise man follows the fashion. What a man does in his *anderūn* is a matter which concerns himself alone; if there is any luxury or extravagance there, his wife gets the credit of it."

This explanation seemed to me a reasonable one.

There was no actual dirt, the whole place was swept as clean as a new pin; but it had a bankrupt look which was sufficiently depressing. Many of the rooms had bare mud walls; to some there were no windows, merely wooden shutters; in others, the windows, which were very old, had never been glazed, but were just covered with oiled paper; the very curtains over the doorways were of commonest chintz, which appeared to have seen long service.

"But what can you want with so many servants, father?" I asked, for there were at least a dozen im-

movable figures standing about, staring steadfastly at the pavement.

"Custom of the country, my dear," said my father, with a sigh; "they get a loaf of bread a-day, a suit of clothes a-year, and no wages. But they are honest, faithful servants all the same," he added.

There must have been at least five-and-twenty rooms in the place, most of which were only matted: there was no furniture of any kind, not a chair or a table, but it had been a very handsome house once upon a time. The walls without and within were of elaborately carved plaster-work, now much cracked and weather-stained; the eaves, which projected some three feet, were covered with beautifully painted festoons of flowers upon faded gilding. Then we visited another melancholy little courtyard in somewhat better repair; it contained two rooms very simply carpeted, bare and cheerless, but apparently wind and water tight.

"My office and my bedroom," said my father, with a laugh; "but follow me, and I will show you the stables: I am proud of my stables, or rather of my horses."

Certainly my father's stable was a sight for sore eyes. A series of rectangular holes in the wall of the courtyard formed the mangers, to which the horses were secured

by head-ropes; the heels of each animal were also fastened by ropes of black camel's-hair to a big iron pin driven into the ground behind it. Each of them was covered by a light woollen sheet, and they were all eating away as though for dear life, it being early summer, when, as my father informed me, all horses are fattened on grass for a couple of months, and do little or no work. There was a great heap of freshly cut green barley, and a boy was busily occupied in cutting this into pieces some three inches long by means of a sort of saw-edged sickle. As soon as a horse had emptied its manger it would look round at the head-groom, who was seated on a brick platform in the middle of the stable-yard, and neigh; then the head-groom would address it by its name, and say affectionately, "Yes, my soul, you shall be attended to immediately;" then he would call to a second boy, who would fill the animal's manger with the freshly cut green barley-grass. "This goes on all day and all night, Madge," said my father, with a laugh; "none of these animals get any grain, and they couldn't grind it if they did, for their teeth are temporarily blunted by the perpetual munching at the green barley stalks. Each horse will eat a mule-load of it in the twenty-four hours, and they are all as

fat as pigs, as you shall see. Now is the horse's annual holiday," and then, by my father's orders, the beautiful creatures were stripped one after the other, and I confess that I had never seen horses so fat or with such shiny coats before. But not one of them stopped eating for an instant, and the long tails never ceased switching and twirling and brushing off the flies in a scientific manner. They never cut horses' tails in Persia, they would consider it cruel; and the long tails, most of which almost touch the ground, certainly add to the animals' appearance.

"The groom seems very fond of the horses," I remarked to my father.

"Yes, he is a capital fellow," he replied; "a highway robber by trade, and a wonderful man for picking and stealing. But my horses are always in good condition, and I should be very sorry indeed to lose my groom, who, though he robs me with praiseworthy regularity, makes it a point of honour never to starve the animals."

And then we inspected a gigantic white ass, with a coat as fine as any horse's: this creature was my stepmother's property, and, being a clever ambler, and an exceedingly large and handsome beast withal, was a very valuable possession. None of the horses were

vicious: they allowed me to pat and caress them, ceasing to eat for an instant to neigh with pleasure, while the groom's small children played about among their feet.

Then I was shown the granary, a huge place containing great earthen jars, some six feet high, standing in rows, which were, as my father told me, filled with barley. I visited too the wood-cellar, crammed from floor to ceiling with immense logs, the winter supply of fuel; and there was a wine-cellar too, where stood a whole regiment of rush-covered carboys, similar to those we keep vitriol in, filled with old Shiraz wine, which had been made upon the premises. I also saw the kitchen, a huge room with a lofty arched roof, having holes at the top to let out the smoke; and all round it were fireplaces made of clay, for the burning of wood or charcoal. There were three great brick ovens, saucepans, pots, and kettles of copper of gigantic size, and strange implements, the uses of which I was unacquainted with. On a small brick platform in the middle of the great kitchen, upon a little carpet, sat a melancholy-looking man embracing his own knees, who glared at us with lack-lustre eyes, but did not offer to rise at our approach.

“That brute,” said my father, “is my head-cook; he is probably drunk with Indian hemp or opium: as he is a capital artist, I have to put up with it.”

I must acknowledge that the contrast between our comfortable quarters in the *anderūn*, and the generally desolate appearance of the *berūni*, or public apartments, was very great. Our doors and windows were of polished walnut-wood, gay with gilding and coloured glass; the carpets in my stepmother's drawing-room, if I may call it so, were at once magnificent, beautiful, and costly; the walls and ceiling ornamented with inlaid mirror-work, and covered with elaborate decorations in bright colours and gilding, toned down by time, gave it the appearance of a vast box of lacquer-work. Not a spot of dirt, not a speck of dust anywhere; over every doorway were heavy curtains of the many-coloured rainbow silk of Yezd. And here, upon our side of the house, all day long, my stepmother's two black women slaves, and the negro boy Feroze, were perpetually rubbing, scraping, polishing, brushing, and dusting, and yet my stepmother never seemed thoroughly satisfied. Two other black women, good-natured, fat, hideous creatures, were continually at work in the little clean whitewashed kitchen, in which charcoal only was used, for fear of

blackening the walls. "I am a happy woman," the Princess once said to me, "for your father will never take another wife, and he loves me very dearly, Madge Khanūm.¹ But, my soul, I have no children; it is the grief of my life. God has forgotten me," she said, and then she burst into tears. "Perhaps, perhaps," she added sadly, "he will grow tired of me."

Of course I did my best to soothe her, but she often returned to this subject, which seemed to grieve her deeply.

Such was my home in Shiraz, and I was very, very happy there. I rapidly picked up the language, and I was soon astonished to find myself counting, thinking, and even dreaming in Persian. From my step-mother's friends, who were the *élite* of the place, I received nothing but kindness and compliments; and in the continual interchange of presents which takes place between the ladies of the upper classes, I was never forgotten. At the innumerable picnics and junketings I was always a welcome guest, and as the step-daughter of a Princess, I was looked upon as a person of high consideration; in fact, I was spoiled, caressed,

¹ *Khanūm*—i.e., lady. Women of the upper classes in Persia seldom use the name without this affix in addressing each other.

and petted to an absurd degree. I had become used to the gay dresses I wore as a Persian lady, and I was thoroughly satisfied with my position; for though I led what many English girls would look upon as a secluded life, yet it seemed to me a round of the wildest gaiety, after the dull, though happy, years I had passed with Miss Methuen. Never having enjoyed the delights of society in Europe, I did not miss them. I had begun to think, like my Persian female friends, that it was a privilege to live safe and secure behind the Eastern veil; and if it had not been for the little golden rose with which I always fastened the kerchief that covered my hair, I think I should almost have forgotten that any of the male sex existed except my father and his servants.

And so two years passed quietly and happily by.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BADR-U-DOWLET'S LOVE-STORY.

WE were all lotos-eaters in Shiraz. From the very earliest spring, when the almond-tree blossoms, and the great wild gardens of the place are white with narcissus and snowdrops, till the middle of November, when it begins to rain, the Shirazis enjoy themselves out of doors; and there seemed to be an endless succession of small earthly paradises, to any one of which they could freely resort. All up the bed, with its sand and stones, that marked the course of the broad Shiraz river at its flood, now a tiny streamlet, for miles and miles ran the innumerable gardens of Meshed Verdi. At any one of these gardens, or rather walled orchards, one was welcome. Sitting on a green carpet of clover beneath the thick shade of the fruit-trees, the party would chat, repose, and alternately enjoy music, singing, or the inter-

minable recitations of the *kissehgoo* or story-teller. One went *en famille*, or one joined a party of ladies; and these women's parties were by no means dull, for there were plenty of girls and young married women, as well as troops of young children of both sexes, nurses, ladies'-maids, and black slave-girls; and sometimes the younger girls or the slaves would dance, — the extraordinary writhing dance, or posturing, which is common throughout the whole East, and seems to have such a strange irresistible attraction to Orientals. And there was much eating of sweetmeats, cakes, and confectionery, and great baskets of fruit freshly plucked from the trees by the gardener: huge peaches and apricots, pomegranates, sweet, acid, sub-acid, or honey-sweet, red, white, or yellow; grapes heaped up in copper trays a yard wide, from the tiny topaz-coloured cloying Ascari, from which is made the sultana-raisin, to the Reesh-i-Baba or Old Man's Beard, the colour of Chinese jade and two inches long; and dark luscious bunches that surpassed our finest Black Hamburgs; and pink grapes perfectly globular, rather insipid, but the size of walnuts; green almonds, cucumbers, small but delicious, which were eaten with salt and seemed to make nobody ill; apples, pears, oranges, and limes; water-melons, pink, white,

yellow, and crimson, as to their inside, having skin varying in colour from wellnigh black to palest green; and huge melons, which had reached a pitch of perfection, being grown in the melon-beds under the fierce Persian sun, and had attained a flavour and size which we in England do not dream of, from the great Gourgabi, with its delicately scented flesh like a jargonelle pear, to the fragrant *Shah-passand*,¹ which looks like a golden ostrich-egg.

I made numberless acquaintances at these garden-parties. My stepmother, as the daughter of the Itizad, took precedence of most of the ladies of Shiraz, for that in Persia is always reckoned by birth, mere wealth receiving very little consideration. Princesses and princes' wives were very plentiful, and many of them were as poor as they were proud. But everybody enjoyed themselves, and a melancholy face was extremely rare.

At the end of autumn, of course, these outdoor entertainments ceased, and long afternoon visitings and feastings, with more formal dinner-parties, enlivened by the antics of buffoons, jesters, and professional singers and dancers, took their place. To these entertainments

¹ King's choice.

one took one's servants, and one slept at the house of the entertainer, returning home after a light refection in the cool of the morning. These more formal gatherings often ended with rather ambitious pyrotechnic displays, a puppet-show, or a pantomime enacted by wandering gipsies, or the buffoons of the town.

The ladies of Shiraz would profusely compliment my stepmother on my supposed good looks, and several most serious offers of marriage were made to her on my account; but with the exception of my father, the confidential Rejab, our black boy Feroze, and the gardeners and buffoons, who are privileged persons, I never looked on a man's face save through the apertures of the perforated embroidery of my long white veil. I had grown so accustomed to my *quasi*-seclusion that I rather liked it than otherwise, and I was so happy in my home-life that I never felt dull.

Among our intimates, and they were few, for we held our heads very high, were the families—and by the families, of course, I mean the wives and daughters—of the Kawan, the hereditary governor of the town of Shiraz; the Hissam-u-Sultaneh, the King's uncle, and Governor of the Province of Fars and Southern Persia; the Elkhani, the chief of the wandering tribes of the

Bakhtiaris, a race of semi-independent mountaineers ; the Imam-i-Juma, or head of the Mahommedan religion of the province ; and the Moollah Bashi, or high priest of the town.

The Moollah Bashi's wife was always spoken of behind her back as "The Monkey." She was supposed to be the ugliest woman in Persia ; but her husband was very wealthy, and she dressed most extensively and in the worst possible taste, wearing a great quantity of expensive jewellery, and being so thickly painted that she resembled nothing human. She was very clever, very ambitious, of a violent temper, and she had a witty tongue which spared nobody. Everybody disliked this woman. To my intense astonishment she professed a strong affection for me. My stepmother explained this to me one day. "She wants you, my dear, to marry her son, Mirza Jaffer of the Cross Eyes, who is the exact portrait of his mother, with the addition of a double squint."

As I have said, "The Monkey" was an ambitious woman.

By this time I had thoroughly won my stepmother's confidence. I was her friend and companion, and I loved her very dearly. One evening, as we three were sitting

on the roof, I turned to my father, and laying my hand upon his arm, I said, "Father, I want you to tell me why you became a Mussulman."

"Well, little woman," said my father indulgently, "if you will have the key of the blue cupboard you must. Here goes. For thirteen years I remained in the employment of the Itizad-u-Sultaneh as a sort of confidential adviser. I made some few friends, good friends and true they were, and I had enemies, men who were jealous of my good fortune and of my rapid promotion. At the New Year, when I always received a handsome money gratuity from my kind old patron, he would invariably say jokingly, 'Well, Methuen Beg, when are you going to turn Mussulman and become one of us?' and I used to laughingly assure him that I was thinking it over. But three years ago he put the matter to me very seriously. 'I should strongly advise you to become a Mussulman,' he said; 'you live like us, you dress like us, and you think like us. Hazret-i-Isau,¹ your prophet, is with us, next to Mahommed, Heaven rest his soul! the greatest of all the prophets. You don't doubt *his* existence, do you? Of course you don't. You believe too in one God? Exactly,' said the old gentle-

¹ Hazret-i-Isau—i.e., Our Saviour.

man, with a chuckle, 'I thought as much. Well, why should you deny that Mahommed is the apostle of God?'

" 'I don't deny,' I replied; 'I am only ignorant.'

" 'And yet you can acknowledge twelve apostles of God,' cried the Itizad, 'of whom you know nothing, or next to nothing. Methuen Beg,' he said in a whisper, 'I am a *Sufi*, a freethinker; but I keep that to myself, and I conform. I go to the mosque every Thursday, I am hand and glove with the Moollahs and chiefs of religion; if they like to amuse themselves by persecuting the Jews and the Armenians, what is that to me? I don't believe half the fables of the Koran: they are just poetic licence, that's what they are, and I discount them, because I am a man of common-sense. Conform, my son,' said the old man persuasively; 'take my hint. You have only got to conform, and you may die Prime Minister of Persia—why not? As it is, it is this accursed religion of yours which stands in your way. Why shouldn't you marry, and marry well? Again your religion. A man of your age ought to be married; why, unmarried, you are hardly respectable,' said the old nobleman, with a laugh. 'Methuen Beg,' he continued, in a solemn whisper, 'I have something to tell you.'

You know that I have a widowed daughter ; my daughter, the Badr-u-Dowlet, is ambitious ; she is a young widow, as you are aware. A girl of ten, she was married for political reasons, by order of the Shah, to her cousin, a boy of nine. The marriage was merely a nominal one ; the poor little bridegroom died within three months of smallpox. My daughter has been a widow for fifteen years, and, *Mashallah !* Methuen Beg, you are a fine man, and you have found favour in her sight, even as Yusuf found favour in the eyes of Zuleikha. Think it over, Methuen Beg, think it over.'

"I had no wish, my child, to turn Mussulman, and marry a Persian princess of whom I knew nothing. My name had been free from scandal of every kind ever since I had been in the country. I had not forgotten your mother, Madge : and I had been a busy man, living in that hotbed of intrigue, Teheran ; struggling at first for a livelihood, then working hard to obtain a competence, that I might return to England and make a home for you. I never could secure that competence ; my expenses were always heavy, and it was generally as much as I could do to make both ends meet. But I did turn Mussulman, and I did marry the Badr-u-Dowlet, your stepmother, not for her money, but because I fell

in love with her. She'll tell you the story better than I can, Madge; she has made me the best of wives, and I am more in love with her than ever," said my father, taking my stepmother's hand and kissing it. And then my stepmother blushed to the very roots of her hair.

"Soul of my soul," said my stepmother to me, "your father is laughing at the pair of us;" and then she snatched up her little lute and sang us a plaintive love-song, and then she burst into tears, and ran out of the room to hide her confusion.

But when we were alone together she told me the story.

"Your father is a very inflammable person, Madge Khanūm," she began; "it wasn't the Badr-u-Dowlet he fell in love with, it was just the pair of black eyes of her confidential attendant Jemileh. I can tell you the story, quite a romance in its way, my dear; and I'm afraid you won't approve of Jemileh, but will think her a forward hussy: all women are forward hussies when they are in love," said my stepmother with a little laugh. "I, the Badr-u-Dowlet, I must tell you, did exactly as I liked with my father the Itizad. Just as you hold your father by the beard, Madge Khanūm, be-

cause he loves you as the very apple of his eye, so did I have entirely my own way in the house of my father the Minister of Sciences. As a great-granddaughter of Futteh Ali Shah, of course my position at Court was assured enough. Had I children, they would be little princes and princesses. I had always been from childhood a great favourite with the Queen-mother, and it was through her influence that I received the sounding title of Badr-u-Dowlet¹ from the King of kings. In fact, had I not been a widow, it is not impossible that I might have attained the loftiest position that any woman can reach in Iran. But I was ambitious; as yet I had never known what love was. I was a person of importance; I had influence, and I had no desire to, as it were, lose my identity, and, in marrying some provincial magnate or high Court official, cease to be talked about and thought about, and be known merely as the wife of So-and-so. So I led my own life, I ruled in my father's great house, and I intrigued as we Persian ladies all intrigue, for I had the ear of the Queen-mother, whose word was law with the Shah; and then, I can't

¹ Badr-u-Dowlet signifies the Full Moon (or Perfection) of the Government. Such titles are frequently conferred by the Shah upon his wives and favourites, and those ladies of rank whom he is especially desirous of honouring.

tell you why, except that he was such a very handsome man, I fell in love with your father. Now, to the mind of a Persian lady, a Christian is an unclean animal, who drinks wine and eats the flesh of swine: the very thought of a Christian used to make me shudder till I saw your father. I used to look upon them as little better than the Jews; and, as you know, every Persian child, when he meets a Jew in the bazaar, curses him and spits upon the ground or stones him. But I heard a great deal of Methuen Beg from my father the Itizad. I knew that he consulted him in everything, and trusted him implicitly. He was accustomed to say to me, 'Child, Methuen Beg is the only really honest man I have ever met.' Your father was neither a profligate, a drunkard, nor a miser; and he was so handsome that copies of his portrait by a Persian artist were sold in the bazaar as the type of manly beauty. And when I saw him for the first time from the curtained windows of the apartments of the Queen-mother at the Royal Salaam, he looked a very Rūstam towering above the heads of the grandees of the assembled Court. I lost my heart, Madge Khanūm, to him at once: I used to see your father in my dreams, my soul," said my stepmother,

blushing deeply. "It would have been all simple enough had your father been one of us.

"My father was an old man, I was his only child; I knew perfectly well what was in store for me at his death. I knew that his vast fortune would then be 'eaten' by the Shah, and that I should assuredly be handed over, willy-nilly, as a wife to some courtier, to whom my great dowry would be the sole consideration for the match: and I knew that, should my father die, there would be no resisting a suggestion from the Shah which would be equal to a command. But I did not want to be married, even to your father, for the sake of my money: though I was no longer a young girl, I was still foolishly sentimental, you see. My father had assigned a little house which immediately adjoined our palace to his confidential adviser, Methuen Beg, and the roof of our women's quarters overlooked it. I took advantage of the fact to get frequent peeps at the handsomest man in Teheran. But I took good care not to compromise myself. Wrapping myself in the common blue-and-white cotton veil of one of my maids, I would peep over at him from the low wall of the roof, without the slightest chance of his discovering my presence or

identity. And it was the little present that I first gave you, Madge Khanūm, that brought us together, as you shall hear. I was leaning over the low wall that separated the roofs of our houses in the cool of a summer's evening, peeping at your father, who, totally unaware of my presence, was seated upon a little carpet, smoking and lost in thought. What really happened was this, though your father pretends not to believe it, and always insists that I threw my bracelet at him. I heard the angry whizz of a mosquito, and, waving my arm to keep the insect off, away flew my bracelet, which fell at your father's feet. He started up, perceived me, picked up the bracelet, and advanced to restore it to me. I held out my hand for it without a word; but as I did so, somehow or other my veil slipped aside, and, horrible to relate, my face was thoroughly revealed to Methuen Beg, the Unbeliever. Your father was completely taken in by that cheap cotton veil.

“‘Ah ha, my pretty maiden!’ he cried, as he held the bracelet just beyond my reach, ‘do you want to make me a present of this costly toy?’ and then he paid me a lot of silly compliments about my good looks, which I’ll not repeat; but I had closely veiled myself once more, and I simply held out my hand, and said, ‘O

Sahib, as you are merciful, give me back the bracelet of the Badr-u-Dowlet, my mistress, or terrible things will happen to me.'

" 'And so you are the servant of the Badr-u-Dowlet, my pretty one ?' said your father, tossing the bracelet in the air and catching it.

" A foreign Unbeliever had called *me*, the Badr-u-Dowlet, a great-granddaughter of Futteh Ali Shah, his 'pretty one.' In my shame I wished that the earth would open and swallow me up ; but after all it was not his fault—that common veil had done it.

" 'O shameless one !' I said, 'give me my mistress's bracelet, and let me go.'

" 'And what is the name of the owner of those pretty eyes ?' said your father, smiling kindly the while.

" 'Ashes on my head ! What can the name of one who is a Mussulman be to an Unbeliever ? O merciless one ! give me the bracelet,' I cried.

" 'Tell me your name, then,' said your father ; 'by your soul, tell me the truth.'

" Thus adjured I could not lie to him. 'My name,' I faltered out, 'is Jemileh.'

" 'Then, Jemileh, you must give me a reward,' said Methuen Beg ; 'you have already made roast-meat of

my heart. You must let me see that pretty face once more, little Jemileh.'

" 'Never, Sahib,' I cried, in my just indignation; 'I would die first.'

" 'Little Jemileh,' said your father, 'you are cruel. I am a lonely friendless man,—won't you be my friend, little Jemileh?'

" 'What words are these? How can I be your friend, and you a Christian?' I cried.

" 'For fourteen years I haven't looked upon a woman's face,' cried Methuen Beg, wearily.

" 'Sahib, give me my bracelet,' I said with feigned impatience, baring my arm and holding out my hand for it, for I feared that if he saw the gold-embroidered sleeve of my *perhan*,¹ he would guess that I was no serving-maid.

" 'It's a very pretty arm and hand,' said your father, who pretended to be lost in admiration. He says so still, she added, with a little sigh of pardonable vanity. 'You'll have to reward my honesty somehow, little Jemileh,' said the handsomest man I had ever set eyes upon. 'Don't you pity my loneliness?' he added, sadly. 'Won't you console me sometimes by your

¹ *Perhan*, a sort of chemise with long loose sleeves, worn by Persian ladies.

charming presence? Ah, Jemileh,' he continued, in tender accents, 'though I'm a Christian I am still a human being.'

"He looked terribly human, and terribly handsome too, as he stood below me, smiling up pleadingly.

"'Give me the bracelet and I'll think of it,' I said, diplomatically.

"I stretched out my hand once more, and then he slipped the bracelet on my wrist and kissed my fingertips.

"'That was worth a king's ransom, Jemileh,' he said. As his lips touched my fingers I knew that my admiration for the man had changed to love. And then I fled, for, O Madge Khanūm, I couldn't trust myself. But somehow or other, dear, I felt that I could trust him. From that moment I *have* loved and trusted him, and I have never, never had cause to regret it, O my daughter.

"We used to meet upon the roof many a time and oft in those soft summer nights. Are not a woman's eyes stronger than chains of iron? And for my sake, or rather for the sake of little Jemileh the serving-maid, your father professed himself a Mussulman. The thing was done in secret, and the same priest and

witnesses who had heard the profession of his faith when he acknowledged that there was but one God, and that Mahommed was the Prophet of God, within the hour assisted at our secret marriage. And on the roof of his house I was married to Gholam Ali, the name the priest had conferred upon your father, and he had settled upon me ten *tomans* in gold, a pound of silk, and a Koran; and the contract had been witnessed, and the priest had blessed us, and the thing was done. And I bribed the priests and the witnesses to secrecy. And so Gholam Ali married Jemileh, and neither he, nor the priests, nor the witnesses, knew that the veiled Jemileh was the daughter of the Itizad-u-Sultaneh, the great-granddaughter of a king. And we kept the secret of our marriage, and our stolen meetings went on just as before.

“And then my father, who was a very old man, was stricken down by illness, and he knew that he would die; and every day one of the King’s servants came to inquire as to the sick man’s condition. And I nursed my father in our women’s quarters; and one night he sent for me. ‘Jemileh,’ he said, ‘heart’s idol, we must soon part, my child. Azrael¹ is so

¹ Azrael, the angel of death.

near that I can almost hear the beating of his wings. When I am gone, child, the Shah, who is so anxious about my health, will seize everything I have in the world, as is his right. But, O my daughter, you will be provided for; your fortune, all in precious stones, is secreted in sure hiding-places known only to myself and Methuen Beg, the Englishman: he is honest, Jemileh, and, being an Englishman, even the Shah dare not molest him. You are alone and unprotected, Jemileh; you will have to marry—you will have to make a choice, and at once. Is there no one among our relatives whom you fancy?’

“And then I told him my secret, for *then* it had to be told.

“‘And so the man who is my friend is one of us at last,’ said my father, after a pause. ‘You have chosen wisely, O my daughter; but why have you kept the secret from your father, the father who loves you so? Methuen Beg is a clever fellow—a very clever fellow,’ he added, with a frown.

“‘Father, forgive me,’ I sobbed; ‘it was my pride. I have kept the secret from you, from my husband, and from all the world, because—because I loved him so; because I gloried in knowing that he married me, a

penniless girl as he supposed, for myself alone, and not because I was the daughter of his protector, and a wealthy woman.'

"'Child, it was an error,' said my father—'a fatal error. There is nothing I could not have done for my son-in-law, he being a Mussulman; but now it is too late. This secret marriage will incense the Shah, and will be made an excuse for persecuting you, for he will not let my lands and wealth escape him. And so he married you, thinking you a penniless girl, eh? And for the little Jemileh he refused the hand of my wealthy daughter, the Badr-u-Dowlet?' Then he smiled. 'Well, well, send for my son-in-law, that I may bless you both before I die.'

"And he did bless us, my child, and the next day he died. And the Shah was furious, and took possession of all my father's property, and banished my husband to Shiraz, giving him the paltry post of Chief of the Powder Factory here. I petitioned the Queen-mother in vain, for she—may she die in a ditch!—shared in the plunder. And so I became a comparatively poor woman for the sake of the love I bore your father; but we saved most of the secret provision my father the Itizad had made for me, and so we are comfortably off, and I don't think

you'll love me any the less, little Madge, now that you've heard my story. I have no regrets, dear; for when a woman really loves the man who is true to her, she thinks she can never have paid too high a price for his affection."

CHAPTER XII.

THE GREAT EARTHQUAKE.

It is always said in Persia that the dreadful calamity that destroyed four-fifths of the city of Shiraz was sent as a punishment from heaven for the wickedness of its inhabitants. I don't think that they were more wicked than the rest of the world; but it was my fortune to be present during the events of that awful time, and I know that it was the hand of Providence that preserved me. Slight earthquakes are very frequent in the south of Persia; they are so common that most of the inhabitants hardly notice them. When I felt one for the first time I was terribly alarmed, and ran, frightened and weeping, to my stepmother. Some pieces of plaster would fall, a distinct trembling of the earth could be felt, and all was over. A few of the more timorous inhabitants of the city, if the shocks were frequently repeated, would retire

to the gardens of Meshed Verdi, or live for a day or two in the tiny wooden summer-houses called *Zilzilleh-khana*¹ (earthquake houses), which are found in the centre of the courtyards of most of the magnates of the place. After a day or two—for these little earthquakes were of such common occurrence as not to be even a nine days' wonder—things would go on just as usual.

One day in early autumn, when we had just finished breakfast, we felt a shock of unusual violence; the doors and windows rattled for what seemed to us several minutes; this frequently recurred at irregular intervals for a period of half an hour; then suddenly there was a loud dull crashing noise heard, followed by a succession of subterranean rumblings. The people in the streets outside began to shout, we rushed out into the centre of the courtyard for safety, and my stepmother, crying out that the end of the world had come, wrung her hands wildly, burst into tears, and flung herself into my father's arms. I too was terribly frightened, but I knew that, unless perchance the earth should open and swallow us up, we were comparatively safe; for even should the

¹ *Zilzilleh* signifies an earthquake—i.e., a trembling. I knew an old gentleman in Shiraz who suffered from shaking palsy, and was universally known as *Mirza Zilzilleh* (Mr Earthquake).

house itself collapse, and we could see it rocking, we were not in danger of being crushed by the falling masonry. Suddenly an extraordinary and terrifying incident happened: the water in the great *hauz*, or ornamental tank, began to sink rapidly, and in a couple of minutes it was empty; and in one corner of the bottom of it we saw a yawning chasm through which the water had escaped. The shouts and cries without grew louder and louder still, and the yells and wailings of women could be heard in the distance. Slowly a great yellow pyramid, which presently nearly obscured the sun, ascended into the clear blue sky; this was a vast cloud of dust, which had risen from the buildings that had fallen in another part of the town. Every minute or two we could hear the resounding fall of masonry as it came crashing to the ground, and each of these sounds would be followed by a succession of the shouts, yells, and screams of the frightened inhabitants of the city. Higher and higher, and thicker and thicker, grew the great pyramid of dust, for there was not a breath of wind stirring to disperse it. My father now ordered the great outer door to be secured at once.

“Thank heaven! the ruin is not in our quarter,” he cried.

Nothing of this kind had occurred in Shiraz within the memory of man, and we soon learned that the destruction in a poor but populous quarter known as the Gōderabān had been very severe. A mosque, fortunately empty at the time, a portion of the bazaar, and some seventy houses had fallen; numbers of people had been killed by falling walls, or buried alive in the ruins; hundreds were reported to be dead or missing. The rabble of the place had turned out in large numbers, not with the object of rescuing their fellow-townsmen, but in the hope of plunder; but the Governor soon posted pickets of soldiers at the scene of the catastrophe, and at length succeeded in restoring comparative order. But when night fell, the bad characters, or *lūtis*, of the place sallied forth, and robbed and plundered with impunity. My father placed two of the servants on guard, providing each of them with a fowling-piece, and ordering them to fire on any one who appeared upon our roof. The roofs in Persia are flat, being made of dried mud; and in the large towns it is quite possible to run from roof to roof, and so proceed a considerable distance. But to leave one's own roof, where most Persians pass the great heats of the summer nights, is considered a most scandalous action, because the privacy of his *anderūn*, which is so

very dear to the oriental mind, is liable in this way to be violated. For women even to walk from roof to roof would be looked upon as highly indecorous ; and in corners of the great roofs the semi-wild street-dogs sleep unmolested and rear their young. Scavengers by day, these animals act as watch-dogs during the night. That night the dogs of our quarter barked and howled continuously, for the roofs were deserted, the inhabitants all sleeping in the centres of their courtyards, in fear of the recommencement of the earthquake of the afternoon. As a precaution, my father, being a Government official, succeeded in obtaining a guard of four ragged soldiers, who took their place at the outer door. Shots were frequently fired at prowling thieves who made their way over the adjacent house-tops in the hope of plunder. There was no fresh shock of earthquake during the night, but several damaged buildings fell, as we knew by the low rumbling crashes, and the shrieks, shouts, and cries of the people in their immediate neighbourhood.

The next morning the water-carrier who supplied us with fresh drinking-water did not make his appearance as usual, and we were told that he had been crushed by a falling wall : no supplies were to be obtained, for the bazaar people had not opened their shops, and it

was with considerable difficulty that we managed to get bread for our immediate necessities. Several of our servants, we found, had fled to the gardens without the city, from which there was a general exodus. But my father decided not to leave his house, knowing that if he did so it would be certain to be plundered by the *lūtis*,¹ who form an unusually large proportion of the unemployed in the city of Shiraz. Great crowds attended the mosques, where public prayer-meetings were being held for the preservation of the city.

A few minutes after noon there came a short series of intermittent shocks, and this continued for fully a quarter of an hour, during which we could hear the loud-chorused prayers coming from the multitude of people collected in the Mosque of Abbas, which was close to our house, and the great green-and-white-tiled dome of which, with its two lofty graceful minarets of yellow, white, and green tilework, stood out against the blue sky on one side of our courtyard. The shocks gradually became more violent, and the shouts of the great congregation collected in the Mosque, as they implored the protection of God, the Prophet, and the

¹ *Lūti* may mean a person who lives by plunder (its literal signification), a professional buffoon, or a worthless person.

saints, rang out louder and louder. The minarets rocked; suddenly one collapsed and disappeared in a cloud of dust, while loud and shrill above the sound of the prayers and lamentations rang out the shrieks of those who had been crushed and injured in its fall. My father, my stepmother, and I stood in impotent terror, watching the remaining minaret, which trembled and swayed as though it had been a tree in a strong wind; and then we saw, to our horror, a long irregular black crack suddenly appear in the great green-tiled, melon-shaped dome of the Mosque; then there was a low subterranean rumbling sound, followed by the creaking, cracking noise of breaking timbers: shrieks, yells, and cries rang out, which filled us with horror, and seemed to freeze our blood; and then came by far the strongest shock we had yet experienced. The vast minaret toppled over, the crack in the tiled dome opened, and the dome itself and the rest of the structure of the Mosque fell with an awful rattling crash: then rose up a great shriek, as from ten thousand throats, of horror, agony, and pain, and where the Mosque had been we saw nothing but a huge cloud of yellow dust. Before we had time to recover from our astonishment and horror,

three rooms, which formed one side of the women's courtyard of my father's house, seemed to suddenly crumble, and were converted in one instant into a heap of ruins—a mere mass of fallen earth, brickwork, and plaster.

There we stood in the middle of the courtyard, my father, my stepmother, and I, too frightened and horrified to utter a sound. In every direction could be heard the fall of walls and masonry, and the sound of the falling of great roofs of mud, some of them a yard in thickness, which went down with the noise of dull, smothered thuds.

And then all at once the shocks ceased, and our curiosity overcame our terror. My stepmother and I followed my father to the lofty roof, and looked out upon the ruined city. Many of the principal landmarks had disappeared: the Governor's palace still seemed intact; the great Mosque and the holy shrine of the Shah Cherragh had escaped. The roofs were black with spectators looking out upon the scene of desolation; entire parishes seemed to have been blotted out, and suddenly changed into low heaps of mud and broken brickwork, through which protruded the torn, bleached extremities of the timbers of the roofs. It was a dread-

ful sight that met our eyes as we looked over into the courtyard of the Mosque of Abbas. A seething mass of men were struggling for exit through the great gate; where the Mosque itself had stood there was a vast mound of bricks, mud, rubbish, and coloured tiles: the dead and wounded lay about in every direction, while there were many groups of men who, kneeling and with uplifted arms, still called upon Heaven for aid.

While we were looking upon this scene of horror, we heard the loud report of a gun, and Rejab suddenly rushed into our courtyard from the *berūni*, and hastily bolted and barred the door of communication.

"O, master, master!" he cried, "our guard are pillaging our house! With the help of the blessed Ali I have accounted for one," he said; and then he deliberately reloaded his gun, and hurriedly joined us upon the roof.

We ran across the roof, and, sure enough, three of our guards, with a number of rabble from the bazaar, were busily engaged in pillaging the place, while a fourth soldier lay upon his face dead in a pool of blood by the ornamental tank.

"Kill, slay, blot out the villains!" cried my step-mother to my father

"They are too many for us, Jemileh," he said, coolly; "we shall have quite enough to do to protect our lives."

The soldiers and the *lūtis* were too busily engaged in carrying off our property to pay much attention to us; but one ruffian shook his fist at my father, and drawing his finger significantly across his throat, shouted out, "Son of a burnt father, we'll come back and exterminate the lot of you, women and all, as soon as we have made a clean sweep!"

Rejab was in the act of raising his gun, but my father placed his hand upon his arm. "We must think of our women," he said, shortly. "Where are the servants?"

"Fled, O my master," cried Rejab. "They have taken what they could carry," he added with a smile.

"The horses are safe?" said my father, anxiously.

"The grooms have bolted," said Rejab, "and have stolen the horses."

"Jemileh," said my father, "we must hold this courtyard till dusk: luckily this roof is higher than the rest of the place, and they can only approach us by way of the *berūni* roof. You are a brave woman, O my wife; keep careful watch here, and should any one attempt to

scale the wall you will shoot him without mercy." Then he gave my mother a pistol from his belt, which she cocked deliberately, and stood there behind the low mud wall, looking calmly at the pillage of our property which was going on below.

We four, and old Nanna Rejab, were alone in the *anderūn*, for Feroze, the women-servants, and the two black slaves had fled without our knowing it immediately after the catastrophe which had overwhelmed the Mosque of Abbas. My stepmother had covered herself with a veil of Nanna Rejab's, a wise precaution, and she bade me run down and provide myself with one of the women-servant's head-coverings.

In the courtyard below I found my father and Rejab hard at work in blocking the door of communication between the two courtyards: they had already, by means of crowbars, flung down great masses of earth and brickwork from the walls behind it, and had rendered the single entrance to the place wellnigh impassable.

"If the *lūtis* attack us now, they will have to dig us out," said my father with a smile.

By my father's order I now carried up the firearms, of which there was a plentiful supply, to the roof, and I also took up a store of ammunition, and then my step-

mother loaded the weapons deliberately one after the other, while I mounted guard behind the wall in her place.

The pillagers below were still very busy, even the carpets they were rolling up and dragging out, and the place was already wellnigh dismantled.

Suddenly a man appeared upon the roof: he had nothing on but his shirt and drawers; in his hand he brandished a naked, double-edged, hiltless dirk some two feet long, and perceiving me he advanced towards the wall.

"Stepmother," I cried in a low voice, "there is a man upon the roof, and he means mischief."

"Hide yourself behind the wall, Madge," said my stepmother as she advanced. "Leave me to deal with him," she added coolly.

Fortunately for us, the rest of the pillagers had by this time retired with their booty.

"Now, little mother," said the man, addressing my stepmother, "I want your mistress's money and your mistress's jewellery, and quickly, for I can't stand talking here in the hot sun."

"Be off, son of an unsainted mother," cried my stepmother. "If I call my master's servants, they will assuredly slay you."

"Your master's servants are far enough away by this time, little mother; it is no use trying to hoodwink me. I am the son of Abu Beckr the butcher, your neighbour, and I waited behind after the rest, who will be back anon, that I might take the money and the jewels as my share. Be quick, then, lest evil befall you and your mistress."

"I have a gold bangle of my mistress's here," replied my stepmother; "you are welcome to that,"—and then she slipped a bangle from her wrist, and I could see that she was offering it over the wall to the *lūti* with her left hand, but her right grasped the pistol. I set my teeth, and I heard the footsteps of the man advancing upon the roof below; then I knew that they were face to face within a foot or two of each other.

"Seek it in hell!" my brave stepmother shrieked.

Then she raised the pistol, there was a loud report, and the sound of a heavy fall.

"Go tell your father that all is well, child," said my stepmother with a smile. "I had to bring him to close quarters, lest I should miss my aim," she added apologetically.

To our astonishment and delight we were left unmolested till sunset. Whether the shooting of the soldie

had frightened the thieves, or whether they had obtained an easier prey elsewhere, I cannot tell; but we were left to our own devices, and my stepmother and I, by my father's direction, dressed ourselves in coarse outdoor clothes left by the women-servants, and my stepmother secured her jewellery about her person; and then, leaving the faithful Rejab on guard upon the roof, we snatched a hasty meal. Then my father said to me, a little solemnly, "Remember this, Madge. Do not leave your stepmother, whatever happens; and should anything occur to me, get hold of the pocket-book you will find in my bosom, and secrete it as soon as possible: your stepmother knows what it contains. We must escape from this place to-night, or we shall all be murdered to a certainty."

We did not dare to leave the house while it was light; we could hear the shouts of parties of marauders who occupied the streets. My father would have been perfectly willing to have stood a sort of siege and have defended the house against all comers; but the terrible scene we had witnessed in the destruction of the Mosque of Abbas, the fact that a third of the city was already in ruins, as we could plainly see, the impossibility of obtaining food, the flight of the servants, and the almost posi-

tive certainty that, if we escaped being buried alive in the ruins of our house by there being no recurrence of the shocks of earthquake, yet we should assuredly be robbed and murdered if we remained, decided him to seek safety in flight.

We heard from neighbours and passers-by, whom we hailed from the high roof as they passed through the narrow street, that the Governor had abandoned his palace, and with the ladies of his harem had taken up his quarters in the Bagh-i-Takht (Garden of the Throne), the great new Government garden just without the city wall. We learned, too, that quite one-half of the soldiers had deserted their barracks and had joined the *lūtis* in their work of plundering the town; that the Kawam (the hereditary Governor of the city), after vainly attempting to preserve order, had declared that unless he were supplied with a large body of soldiery by the Governor of the province, he would not be responsible for the lives and property of the inhabitants; and that he was actually practically besieged in his own house, but that he had sent away his women and children to his garden of Dilgoosha. Bands of villagers and men from the wandering tribes, we were told, were coming rapidly into the city and joining the innumerable plunderers, to whom

most of the houses were an easy prey, as nearly all of the wealthy inhabitants had fled for their lives to the gardens ; and that Ali Nekki, a fanatical priest, was openly declaring in the great Mosque that the end of the world had arrived, and as he had a great number of followers among the poorer classes, this had added greatly to the general confusion. All these things helped to determine my father in his resolve to seek some place of refuge outside the city as soon as night had fallen. We could hear the frequent sound of tumults in the streets, and every now and then the discharge of firearms ; everybody carried a weapon of some sort, while little parties frequently passed by, bearing the bodies of their dead or wounded relatives from the Mosque of Abbas. Wailings for the dead, curses, threats, and shrieks for mercy resounded in every direction ; and every now and again some half-wrecked building would fall with a dull crash, whereon a loud shout of horror would go up from a thousand throats. The Moollah Bashi (chief priest), our neighbour, and his family had retired, we were told by one of his servants, to the garden of the Sheikh-ul-Islam (the chief of the religious law), which garden was only a quarter of a mile from the gate of the town that was nearest to our house ; and the fact of its proximity,

and that the Moollah Bashi was his personal friend, determined my father to make an attempt to join him there.

“If we can only reach the Sheikh’s garden alive,” said my father, “we shall be comparatively safe.”

CHAPTER XIII.

A NIGHT OF HORROR.

It was now three hours after sunset, and by this time the narrow unlighted streets had become wellnigh pitch-dark; but both my father and Rejab were well acquainted with the road, and my father told us that once outside the city we should have little to fear, for he argued that the *lūtis* and the other plunderers, finding their prey in the deserted houses, would be hardly likely to interfere with foot-passengers, the men of whose party were well armed.

We were unable to reach the street by the ordinary means, for we had most effectually blocked up the one door of exit of our *anderūn*; so getting the long rope from the well, my father was lowered by Rejab from the roof, which was here some twenty feet high, into the street below, which when we made our start was

absolutely deserted. Then Rejab lowered down a couple of double-barrelled guns to him, and then my stepmother, by the same means, descended in safety; I and Nanna Rejab followed, last of all came Rejab himself. And then we all hurried down the narrow tortuous lane, passing several dead bodies lying in the road, people who had been killed in the frequent street skirmishes that had taken place; and we soon learned the reason why we had the lane to ourselves, for we found that it was here blocked by fallen walls. And now my father produced a little *farnūs* or candle lantern, such as is carried at night by servants and poor people; this he lighted, and we managed to scramble to the summit of a great heap of broken mud wall. When we got to the top of the mass of *débris* we could see into a deserted courtyard on each side of us; there was not a sign of life in either of them, and one I recognised as the women's quarters of my father's acquaintance the Moollah Bashi.

"He has then assuredly taken refuge in the Sheikh's garden," cried my father, as we descended once more into the lane. "If the road is only clear, we shall be safe in half an hour," he added joyfully.

We hurried on through the narrow alley, which was here not more than two yards wide, Rejab in front

carrying the lantern, I and the old woman following him; while my father, with my stepmother leaning on his arm, brought up the rear. Just as I was congratulating myself on our approaching safety, without the slightest warning, the earth trembled and shook so violently beneath our feet that we all stopped mechanically from fear. We heard the noise of falling walls in every direction, and we were only brought to our senses by my father commanding Rejab, in an imperious tone, to hurry on.

“Run, run for your life, little lady!” cried the faithful servant, as he grasped my wrist.

Then a dreadful thing happened. A shower of stones and brickbats seemed to descend upon our very heads, and then Rejab gave a shout of horror and turned and held the lantern high in air: at first we could see nothing through the cloud of thick dust in which we were enveloped.

“Father!” I screamed; but there was no answering voice.

As the cloud of dust cleared away, I saw a great heap of rubbish in which my father was buried to the waist: there was no sign of my stepmother.

“She is dead, she is killed!” moaned my father.

I rushed to him.

"Save yourself, Madge," he groaned, and there was death in his voice. "I think my back is broken, Madge," he said wearily. "Poor wife, poor little faithful wife. Take it, child," said my father with an effort, drawing a pocket-book from his bosom and thrusting it into my hand, "and guard it well."

Suddenly, before I could answer him, Rejab dropped the lantern, seized me round the waist, and dragged me from the place; and as he did so, a vast mass of crumbling brickwork fell, and a great falling wall buried my dying father beneath its ruins before my very eyes. Rejab, catching me up in his arms, ran down the lane through the darkness, his mother hurrying along screaming at his side. And then I must have fainted; and when I came to myself we were in the open country outside the city walls, and I was lying on the ground with my head in the old woman's lap, and she was bathing my forehead with water in order to recover me; and by us stood Rejab, leaning on his gun, silently weeping. These things I saw in the moonlight as I came to myself.

"Where is my father gone, Nanna Rejab?" I said at last.

She didn't answer me, she simply kissed my hand, crying with joy the while; and then she said, "Ah, woe's the day!" and then she added caressingly, "I thought my little maid had died of fright."

Then it all came back to me at once, and I knew that my father had died a dreadful death, and that she who had been a second mother to me was taken from me, and that I was alone and friendless,—no, not quite friendless—I had two faithful friends by my side who I knew would never desert me. Then I lost consciousness once more, only to awake again to the knowledge of my own helplessness and misery. And then the old woman roused me.

"Make one effort, little lady," she said, as she raised me to my feet,—“only one effort, and in a few minutes we shall be safe.”

Then I managed to totter on, Rejab leading the way, weeping aloud the while; and it suddenly dawned upon me that with my right hand I was still clutching my father's pocket-book; and then I remembered that my poor father's last thought had been of me, and the pocket-book I secreted, as my father had ordered. And as I stumbled along wearily, weeping at the old woman's side, how I wished that I too might have

died! and I forgot to thank Heaven for my preservation: I was too dazed for that.

At length we reached the great walled garden of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, and Rejab knocked lustily with a stone upon the outer gate. Suddenly a man appeared upon the wall above, and, covering him with a gun, challenged him and demanded his business. The man, however, soon recognised our Rejab, and willingly admitted us. And then the old woman congratulated me on our safety; but I was too sick with grief, and with the remembrance of the dreadful events of the last hour, to respond to her loving words.

I was conducted at once into the presence of the wife of the Moollah Bashi. She received me effusively: she was already comfortably installed in one of the two big rooms which the little garden-house contained, while the other apartment was occupied by the Moollah Bashi himself and his son, Mirza Jaffer the Cross-Eyed.

"My heart is at rest now," said the Moollah Bashi's wife, with delightful insincerity. "All through this dreadful time I have thought of nothing but you, O my soul. I said to myself, 'If the charming daughter of Methuen Beg should fall a victim to the earthquake,

my son Mirza Jaffer, who, as everybody knows, is the most lovable youth in Shiraz, would die of grief.' And so you have got here safely after all,—your footsteps are fortunate, you are very welcome. And her Excellency the Badr-u-Dowlet and our brother the excellent Methuen Beg are staying behind, like sensible people, to look after their property, eh?"

I only shook my head: it was beyond me to tell her in so many words the story of our dreadful flight from the city, and how my father and his wife had died. But Nanna Rejab volunteered an account, and became at once the centre of general interest. As she stood behind me facing the chief priest's wife, she told what had happened glibly and graphically to the little circle of excited women; she even illustrated it with pantomimic gestures, showing how we had been lowered from the roof one by one by her son Rejab; then she described the lane outside our house, with oriental exaggeration, as "paved with dead bodies": there were so many corpses, she said, that it was difficult to avoid treading on them. And then she told of the great final shock of the earthquake, and how she actually saw her mistress the Badr-u-Dowlet buried in the falling ruins.

"She is dead, then?" cried the wife of the Moollah Bashi, smiting herself upon the head. "Ah," she added philosophically, addressing me, "may I be your sacrifice, little lady; if I had had such jewels as the Badr-u-Dowlet, your stepmother, I would have let all Shiraz have tumbled about my ears rather than have abandoned them. Why, if she hadn't left her house she might have been alive now with that beautiful jewellery of hers comfortably hidden."

"She had her jewels upon her person," said Nanna Rejab, sadly.

"What!" cried the wife of the Moollah Bashi, springing to her feet in her excitement—"what! The jewels are there in the street by our house, buried beneath a heap of brickbats? Where is the Moollah Bashi—where is my son Aga Mirza Jaffer? They must—they must take steps to—to recover the bodies at once. Praise God, your father Methuen Beg was a good Mussulman, and the Badr-u-Dowlet's jewels were a fortune—a fortune. Let the Moollah Bashi and my son Aga Mirza Jaffer be summoned at once."

In a few minutes the Moollah Bashi and his son entered the room, and all we women, except his wife, discreetly veiled ourselves.

"What means all this confusion, sweetheart?" said the little old man as he settled his huge white turban upon his head, rubbed his eyes wearily, and stroked his long orange-coloured¹ beard; and then he took a seat on the floor at the head of the room and yawned with great deliberation. Mirza Jaffer, the Cross-Eyed, his son, placed himself decorously at his father's side without a word; and as I gazed upon him for the first time, I could not help acknowledging the justice of the nickname by which he was universally known. I had never seen such a terrible natural deformity as the double squint of the Moollah Bashi's son.

"Take a cup of tea to his Excellency the Moollah Bashi," said the lady of the house to one of her women.

"It is not a time for tea," said the old man, with a wave of his hand; "tea at midnight is bad for the digestion. Say your say, O Zimrūd Khanūm,² and let my son and me return to our supplications to Heaven for the safety of the city," and then both men began to finger their rosaries, yawning loudly the while.

¹ Beards in Persia are invariably dyed with henna, which produces a red or orange colour; a subsequent application of indigo renders them a glossy black.

² Zimrūd Khanūm = Mrs Emerald.

"There is a time for prayer and a time for action, O Moollah Bashi," shrieked out Zimrūd Khanūm. "The Badr-u-Dowlet and Methuen Beg are dead,—as Heaven is merciful they are dead, I say," she added, striking her head with her clenched fist. "Our bosom friends the Badr-u-Dowlet and her husband are dead!" she repeated.

"Well," said the Moollah Bashi with another yawn, slowly stroking his beard, "if they *are* dead you needn't wake me up in the middle of the night to tell me so; half Shiraz is dead by this time. I will pray for them, my son and I will pray for them, but we can't bring them back to life, O Zimrūd Khanūm!"

"And are their bodies to lie unburied to be food for the jackals?" cried the lady. "Know, O Moollah Bashi, that the Badr-u-Dowlet had her jewels concealed about her person when she was struck down."

This communication appeared to thoroughly awaken the Moollah Bashi.

"Methuen Beg was a Mussulman," he said, very solemnly,—*"a Mussulman, and my very good friend and our neighbour; and the holy Koran forbids that the bodies of Mussulmans should lie unburied. A search must be made, and at once; this is a work of charity, a*

duty that must not be neglected. But how are we to find the bodies? There is little left of the city but a vast heap of ruins," and then the Moollah Bashi and his wife began to converse in whispers.

At length the two men retired; and then Zimrūd Khanūm attempted to console me in a perfunctory manner, and pressed tea and refreshments upon me. But I begged to be allowed to retire, for I set down her sympathy at its true value; and I laid me down at last in a corner of the room with the faithful old Nanna Rejab seated at my side; and at length, worn out by sheer fatigue, I sank into an uneasy sleep.

Of the events of the next three weeks I have no recollection. I was mercifully stricken down with brain fever, and the faithful old woman nursed me with a mother's care; and it was only very gradually that the awful events of that dreadful time came back to me.

I became slowly convalescent, and the Moollah Bashi's wife overwhelmed me with attentions which I accepted gratefully, for I knew that the Moollah Bashi had been a friend of my father's. But what surprised me greatly was that this lady appeared anxious never to let me out of her sight. We were still staying in the garden of the Sheikh-ul-Islam, for a terrible pestilence, as I learned,

raged within the walls of the ruined city, and the High Priest did not consider it as yet safe to return to his own house.

From what Nanna Rejab told me, I learned that I was practically penniless: our *anderūn* had been stripped on the day succeeding our flight by the *lutis*. I had no one to whom I could apply for assistance, and here I was, an orphan in Persia, friendless and alone, eating the bread of charity.

"I have been your worst enemy, little lady," said old Nanna Rejab to me one day; "I would I had bitten my tongue off ere I had betrayed to that termagant the details of your father's death. Well have they named her The Monkey, for she has no heart and no bowels of compassion. Ah, merciless one," she cried, shaking her fist in the direction of the house, "may you die a dreadful death, and may the graves of seven generations of your ancestors be defiled! You don't know, my lamb, the extent of the diabolical wickedness of that woman," she cried; "she has robbed you of your fortune, child. I have seen some of your stepmother's jewels with these eyes. But that is not enough to content this she-devil, —she must needs marry you to the cross-eyed son of the old conjuror, her husband; and she'll do it, too," said

the old woman, grinding her teeth. "If the Kawam's wife were in the town, we might take refuge with her; but she has gone to her village, and before she returns you will be married to the ugliest man in the province of Fars, unless—unless," said Nanna Rejab, "I poison his coffee, or my son Rejab puts a bullet into him."

"But I can't be married against my will, Nanna Rejab," I said; "they can't make me marry him."

"You don't know our holy men," replied the old woman. "The Moollah Bashi has given out that you were secretly betrothed to his son, and that, now you are penniless, he is going to perform an act of charity and marry you. I have heard the betrothal contract read, and it is sealed with your father's seal and duly witnessed in proper form."

"But my father would never——" I began.

"Of course he wouldn't," burst in the old woman; "but they've got his seals, and so they forged the contract."

"But surely the law will prevent such wickedness!" I cried.

"The law!" replied Nanna Rejab, with a bitter laugh; "the Moollah Bashi is above the law. The Sheikh-ul-Islam, who is the chief of the law, is his bosom friend."

Who is to say him nay? You will never see your step-mother's jewels till you are the wife of Mirza Jaffer. And be careful, Madge Khanūm—should you breathe a word of what I have told you, it might cost us both our lives. If we had some powerful protector, things might be different; as it is, we can do nothing but trust in God and His Prophet."

"If, as you say, Zimrūd Khanūm has stolen the jewels, well, much good may they do her; there is no more to be said. But why should they want to marry me, a penniless girl, to Mirza Jaffer?"

"Ah, bah, child! Cannot you understand, my darling, that the man has fallen in love with you? You have made roast-meat of his heart; the marriage is announced, and will take place, Madge Khanūm, unless Mirza Jaffer perchance should die," she added grimly, in a meaning whisper.

I knew perfectly well that it was no use making an appeal to the feelings of the Moollah Bashi: he was absolutely under The Monkey's thumb; he had married her in order to obtain the succession to her father's office, which he succeeded on getting on the old man's death; and he had been her slave and puppet ever since.

Zimrūd Khanūm summoned me to her presence one

day. "Child," she said, "you are no longer a mere girl. Praise to God, you are endowed with understanding; you have been instructed in the knowledge of the Unbelievers, and you have suffered a great misfortune. Your father has been blotted out from amongst the living, and my husband, myself, and my family are your only friends. Were it not for us, you might be now earning your living as a menial, for who would be anxious to receive as a daughter-in-law a penniless European? But the Moollah Bashi, my husband, may his footsteps be fortunate, is a just man, and a man of his word; and I love you, child. I love you, I can't tell you how much I love you," she added, with a dreadful leer which she intended for an affectionate smile. "And someone else loves you, too," she went on mysteriously; "my son, my only son, Mirza Jaffer, has deigned to look on you with a favourable eye. Mirza Jaffer, the son of the Moollah Bashi, to whose addresses the prettiest and wealthiest women in the province of Fars would only be too glad to lend a willing ear. I don't wonder that you are abashed at your great good fortune," she continued, noticing my blushes. "My son, Mirza Jaffer, ought to have done much better, of course; but I, who am his mother, will not stand in your way, Madge

Khanūm. Mirza Jaffer is wealthy,—he can afford to listen to the dictates of his heart. What is marriage without love, what is a husband without riches? My son is pleased to say that he is content to take you with the dowry of nothing but good looks. Who can argue with a lover? What say you, Madge Khanūm? You have seen my son, and he is, praise God, of a tender disposition like his father; and let me tell you, child, that it is a great thing to be mistress in one's own house. And now, all we have to do is to fix a day for your wedding, and to summon the traders that they may supply you with clothes suitable to one who is shortly to fill the proud position of wife to the son of the Moollah Bashi of Shiraz. Well, child, why don't you speak?" she cried, sharply. "Your poverty needn't trouble you; it will be a pleasure to me—yes, a pleasure—to pay for the clothing myself."

"I am too young to marry, Khanūm," I faltered out at length.

"Young!" screamed out Zimrūd Khanūm,—“too young, you! Why, I married the Moollah Bashi when I was eleven, and you must be much more than that.”

"I am just eighteen," I said; "in my country girls seldom marry at eighteen."

"But you are not in your country, you are in Persia; and, in Persia, unless a girl is very poor or very ugly, she marries long before she is eighteen. Now you are a very pretty girl, Madge Khanūm, though you are poor; and my son, Mirza Jaffer, is over head and ears in love with you, so we'll overlook your poverty."

"I should be ashamed," I said, "to go to a husband's house empty-handed."

"It isn't your fault, it is your misfortune," said Zim-rūd Khanūm, reassuringly. "Probably your father was possessed of means of some sort, and your stepmother assuredly had jewels of great value. But then, you see, his money was certainly buried, or lent on mortgage; and as for her jewellery, poor thing, there was no sign of that when the Moollah Bashi caused her to be buried. My only wonder is that you escaped with your life on that dreadful night."

"Perhaps it would have been better for me if I had not," I replied, bitterly. "But it does seem strange to me," I added, "that nothing has ever been heard of my stepmother's jewels. I have seen them, and several are notable stones. Surely it would be worth while to advertise their loss."

"That would be madness, simple madness," cried

Zimrūd Khanūm, excitedly. "We know you are poor, Madge Khanūm, but nobody else does. Shiraz looks upon you as the heiress of your stepmother, the Badr-u-Dowlet, and will envy my son when he marries you. But it would be a horrible scandal for Mirza Jaffer, the son of the High Priest of Shiraz—a man who will be High Priest of Shiraz himself some day—to marry the penniless daughter of an Unbeliever, a girl who is actually an Unbeliever still—one whose very clothes are not her own property—a girl who couldn't even earn her own living as a seamstress if she tried."

"I don't see how your son is to marry an Unbeliever, Zimrūd Khanūm," I said.

"That won't trouble him, little lady," said the Moolah Bashi's wife. "As you ought to know by this time, with many of the priestly class religion is merely a matter of business. Do you think religion troubles my husband? Not a bit of it: the little wretch drinks like a fish. But he is the most intolerant of all the priesthood of Shiraz, and is universally feared and respected. He is the terror of all the free-livers of the city. He blackmails the Jews and Armenians very freely. Who is most strict in keeping the fast of Ramazan? My husband, the Moollah Bashi. Who is

the terror of the dervishes? The Moollah Bashi. Whose charms, during an epidemic, are worth more than all the drugs in all the apothecaries' shops in the place? Why, the sale of charms in cholera times is quite a large income to the Moollah Bashi. He is guardian to half the wealthy orphans in the town, and very pretty pickings he gets, as you can fancy. And let me tell you that the position of the wife of the Moollah Bashi of Shiraz is a most exalted one. Why, with the exception of the Governor's wife and the Kawam's lady and a few royal princesses, I take precedence over all the ladies in the city; and my Jaffer will be Moollah Bashi himself when his father's time comes. And my husband will convert you—of course he will. In fact, I have given out that you are converted already. That will save a lot of talking, you see. I know your European customs, Madge Khanūm. You Europeans are uncivilised; and I have often heard from your poor stepmother that in Inglistan (England) young people select mates for themselves, and actually meet and talk poetry and look each other in the face before they are even married, just as common villagers or the very, very poor might do here in Persia. It's dreadfully degrading, of course; and my poor Jaffer,

who is a bashful boy, was horrified at the very thought of being alone with you. But he is very much in love, little lady, is my Jaffer; and he is quite ready to make allowances. He has consented, at my solicitation, to have a private interview with you; and he is the most eloquent man in Shiraz, is Jaffer. When you listen to his graceful periods, child, it will be all over with you—you will have lost your heart. It won't be really a private interview," she added, confidentially. "I shall take care to be well within earshot of the conversation; for it would be a scandalous thing, indeed, that you two young people should be alone together for a single instant. Ah!" said Zimrūd Khanūm, sentimentally, "it will be like a meeting between Leila and Mudjnūn, or Ferhad and Shireen—those incomparable lovers about whom the poets sing so sweetly. It will be like listening to a conversation between the Bulbul and the Rose. Ah, my soul! the very idea makes me blush at the thought of the dreadful impropriety of a meeting between two young people of your exalted position in society," said the woman, who was known among the Shiraz ladies as The Monkey.

I was not at all anxious to have a private interview with Mirza Jaffer, the Cross-Eyed, but I thought that

it would put an end to a monstrous situation. "When I tell Mirza Jaffer," I said to myself, "that I do not care for him, and that I never can care for him, his pride will cause him to forego his suit: when I tell him that I am a Christian, and mean to remain a Christian, that will present an insuperable barrier." So I jumped at the offer.

"I shall be only too happy," I said, "to talk matters over with your son, Zimrūd Khanūm. As you say, it is a custom of my country."

And then Zimrūd Khanūm was overjoyed, and overwhelmed me with dreadful kisses and embraces, and called me her daughter, and her soul, and her heart's delight; and then she left me to summon Mirza Jaffer.

I discreetly veiled myself, for I did not wish Mirza Jaffer to look upon me as a shameless person; and in a few moments the Moollah Bashi's son appeared. He was evidently arrayed for conquest. His hands, moustache, and eyebrows had been freshly dyed with the juice of the henna plant; his long outer garment of pale-blue calico—for, being a Moollah, he, of course, did not wear silk—was girdled by a beautifully embroidered Cashmere shawl of a sombre colour; his camel's-hair cloak, with its broad brown and white

stripes, was evidently brand-new, as were the pair of short white cotton socks he wore, *above* which were freely exhibited a pair of bony ankles; and the huge turban of white muslin was placed on his head with a knowing cock. I had never yet seen Mirza Jaffer, the Cross-Eyed, look so refreshingly clean.

He was evidently determined to treat me with the very greatest respect.

"*Salaam aleikūm*, peace be with you, little lady," he mumbled out as he squatted himself upon the floor at the farther end of the apartment, fixing his cross eyes decorously upon the ground.

I returned his salutation.

Then Mirza Jaffer began to finger his rosary and appeared lost in silent prayer, his lips moving the while. This is the invariable custom of Persian holy men, who, when they are not talking, are supposed to be engaged in religious meditation.

"Lady," he said at last, "I trust you are in good health. I trust you have thoroughly recovered from your recent illness. If that be so, my face and the face of the Moollah Bashi my father are indeed whitened, and our heads are wellnigh touching the skies. Pray excuse the agitations of the humblest of your slaves."

I hastened to assure him that I was perfectly well ; and then in duty bound, in my turn, I inquired after his health.

"Ah, Madge Khanūm," he replied, with a hollow groan, "I am no longer the man I was: my liver has turned to water, and I have lost my appetite, ever since the moment of your delightful advent to our humble home."

I expressed my regret in suitable terms.

"I am losing flesh daily," said the Moollah Bashi's son, with great solemnity. "There is only one medicine for my woes, one remedy for my ailments. You can cure me by a word: only tell me that the unfortunate Jaffer is not indifferent to you, and from the most miserable of his sex I shall become at once the happiest of men." He emphasised this last remark by a dismal groan.

Ridiculous as this extraordinary declaration may seem, I could not help feeling that the unfortunate Mirza Jaffer was very much in love indeed.

"Mirza Jaffer," I said, "you pay me a very great compliment: were I to take advantage of your temporary weakness, were I to look upon your words as anything but a delicate civility, I should be a very wicked girl indeed. Whose dog am I that I should aspire to the

love of the son of the Moollah Bashi? You are a Musulman and I am a Christian."

"Little lady," said Mirzah Jaffer, slily, "our Lord Mahommed, God bless and keep him, was not insensible to the charms of the lady Mariam, who was, as you are aware, a Christian. She was second only to the fair Ayesha in his affections."

"Think of the scandal, Mirza Jaffer," I said, "were a man of your sanctity to wed with an Unbeliever."

"Not a bit of it," he replied; "it would be just a nine days' wonder."

"Besides," I continued, "you, who are a general favourite, should aspire to a brilliant match: it is a proverb among the priests in my country that a clergyman can marry anybody."

"That may be so in your country," replied my admirer, "but in Persia we Moollahs usually have to take the ugly ones. My mother is a case in point. I don't think I could marry an ugly woman," added Mirza Jaffer, with fatuous confidence.

"But I assure you, Mirza Jaffer," I replied, "that I am not even nice-looking."

"Madge Khanūm," said the suitor, "on the night of the earthquake I had a full view of your celestial charms,

—you were too ill and too frightened to veil yourself,—and from that moment you made roast-meat of my heart, and since that day I have been very ill indeed, I assure you. Instead of going to the Mosque to attend to my duties, I have passed my time in peeping at you from behind curtains, and I know that without you life would be indeed unbearable: there would be nothing left for the wretched Jaffer to do but to turn dervish or to take poison. Heaven preserve me from that deadly sin,” he added, piously.

“But I am not fitted to be the wife of a priest,” I said. “In my own country the married women are not secluded.”

“Don’t let that trouble you,” said Mirza Jaffer. “A merry heart with us priests is often concealed under the most solemn exterior. Be it known to you, O lady, in the strictest confidence, that both I and my father drink wine in secret: and if your heart is pining for the strong waters of the Europeans, there is no reason why you shouldn’t indulge your taste. I am prepared to make every allowance. I will even secure a supply of *brandee* from Bushire for your private use. I will fill my house with dancers and musicians, and we would enjoy ourselves from sunset until dawn in the European manner.”

"But you have not seriously considered my poverty, Mirza Jaffer," I said. "Why, the very clothes I wear are provided by your mother's charity."

"That was an obstacle at first, I acknowledge," said my strange suitor; "but we may yet come upon the thieves who have stolen your stepmother's jewels," he said, in a confidential whisper, "and, in that case, I should certainly insist upon your rights. I may look a fool,—my appearance is against me, I know,—but where money is concerned I am a very wolf, and I should look after our mutual interests."

As he said the words I fancied that I detected the sound of a little *frou-frou* from the silken curtain that covered the door at my side.

"There is another thing you should consider," said Mirza Jaffer. "You must marry somebody, you know. I'm a bachelor, and in your own *anderûn* you would be without a rival,—you would have my undivided affection; that's an immense advantage in most women's eyes."

"Don't you think we might let matters rest awhile, Mirza Jaffer?" I said, trying to temporise. "My father is but two months dead; surely it isn't a time to think of marrying."

"Your scruples become you, little lady," said Mizra

Jaffer; "you are quite right, I should make allowance for your recent grief. I would wait if you wished it. Let us say this day three months. Were I only able, with your consent, to make our betrothal public, it would simplify matters immensely. As I said before, you must marry somebody, you know. And it may be just as well that I should announce to you that our union was agreed upon by your deceased father and her lamented Excellency the Badr-u-Dowlet. You have been betrothed to me in legal form under a proper instrument, sealed by your father and witnessed by two persons of good repute. Your father, poor man, is unable to carry out his part of the contract by giving you a suitable dowry; but we are prepared to waive that, and even to acknowledge the money as received, so that, in case of my death or our divorce, the sum would have to be repaid to you, and thus you would have the best possible security for my good behaviour—you would have my beard in your hand, for I couldn't afford to divorce you, Madge Khanūm."

The sudden confession of this piece of abominable wickedness upset my equanimity altogether. I sprang to my feet to terminate the interview, but words failed me at first: then in my just rage and indignation I spoke my mind to the Moollah Bashi's son. "Dog and son of

a dog," I cried, "do you think that my dear father, even to save his life, would have betrothed me to such as you? Till now I was grateful for what I looked upon as the charity of your family, but as to this story of a betrothal it is a shameless lie. Rather than marry you I would beg my bread from house to house—and, God be praised, there is plenty of charity among the Mussulmans."

"Not to a Christian," replied Mirza Jaffer, who had turned a sickly yellow,—“not to a Christian. Think better of it, little lady,” he cried, as he flung out of the room in a rage, “lest the tender mercies of Zimrūd Khanūm, my mother, make you wish that you had never been born.”

As I turned from him I found myself face to face with the Moollah Bashi's wife, who stood in the inner doorway, the raised silken curtain in her hand, choking with furious indignation. She poured upon me a torrent of abuse so foul that I shall not attempt to translate it. Then she paused for breath. “And so,” she cried, “my fine lady, you dare to refuse the hand of Mirza Jaffer; you dare to disobey the written commands of your dead father. My son is not good enough, forsooth, for the whey-faced daughter of a misbegotten Unbeliever! Go,

take your insipid smiles to the Bazaar, and see what they'll fetch. The servants' clothes you came to me in are a fitting dress for such as you; much good may they do you—you are very welcome to them. Take off my property and resume your own," she cried, snatching the silken kerchief from my head. "Out of my house this instant, witch! I'll soon make you feel that the wife of the Moollah Bashi is not to be trifled with."

"What is the meaning of this tumult, O wife?" said the Moollah Bashi, who now entered the room.

"Thank Heaven, you have arrived in time to protect me, O Moollah Bashi!" cried Zimrūd Khanūm. "Ashes on my head, I am beaten, I am assaulted, I go in fear of my life from this Daughter of the Devil, from this foreign woman, who blasphemes our holy religion. Ah, I die!" screamed the lady, casting herself suddenly upon the floor in a violent fit of simulated hysterics.

"Is this your work, Madge Khanūm?" said the little old man to me. "Is it thus you repay the charity of those who have befriended you."

"Till now, O Moollah Bashi," I said, trying to keep calm, "I have met with nothing but the greatest kindness and hospitality in this house,—a kindness which I shall never forget, and a hospitality for which I shall

be ever grateful. I trust that I should be the last to seek to cause the least annoyance to the Lady Zimrūd, but she has used language to me which it is impossible that I should repeat; she has bade me to leave her house, and she has threatened me, O Moollah Bashi. And the Khanūm is right: after the words that have been spoken I cannot stay in your house, but I shall ever be grateful for the kindness I have received here. And if I did lose my temper with the Lady Zimrūd, I humbly ask her pardon now of you."

"Do not excite yourself, little lady," said the Moollah Bashi. "Why should you leave my house? You are, praise God, a pleasant object for an old man's eyes to rest upon. You——"

"Ah, wretch! ah, monster! ah, hypocrite!" cried the Moollah Bashi's wife. "He dares to make love to her before my very eyes. Hear, O ye women. If I die, my death is at the door of this aged debauchee, who is only too anxious to supplant my son in the affections of this foreign Daughter of the Devil. Salaam, Madge Khanūm," she cried, rising and making me a low obeisance; "let him send for a priest and marry you at once. So you prefer the father to the son! No wonder you are grateful for the Moollah Bashi's kind-

ness and condescension—a pretty scandal truly. Ho, ye women, come and collect my property, that I and my son may leave this place. You wish to divorce me, I suppose? but it is I who will be divorced from this wicked old man, who would rob his own son of his wife. But no,” she cried, snapping her fingers in the face of the astonished Moollah Bashi, “there shall be a public scandal, it is you who shall divorce me, and then you will have to pay up my dowry to the uttermost farthing. This is what comes of your secret wine-drinkings; you must needs find a cup-companion in this fascinating Infidel of yours. If I and my son hadn’t trusted you, we should have guessed what was going on under our very noses. Ah,” she cried, suiting the action to the word as she snatched it from his head, “I spit upon the sacred turban which you have dishonoured,” and then she began to slap his bald pate violently. “O women,” she cried, as she went on with the slappings, “O women of Shiraz, deliver me from the Moollah Bashi, who is become a wine-bibber and the chief of *lutis*. He is bewitched! My husband, the Moollah Bashi, is bewitched! Help, O ye women of Shiraz!” And then she went off into a second fit of sham hysterics.

But no one came to the lady's assistance. The Moollah Bashi hurriedly recovered his turban, and calmly seated himself at the upper end of the apartment. "My child," he said, "since my wife does me the honour of being jealous, there is nothing more to be said. If you definitely reject my son's addresses, if he has not found favour in your eyes, you shall be conveyed at once to the *anderūn* of the Inaum-i-Juma; there you will be safe from persecution."

"And who is to repay me for the money I have expended on the lady who has supplanted me in your affections?" cried Zimrūd Khanūm, suddenly regaining consciousness, and sitting bolt upright in the centre of the apartment. "She settles accounts with me before she leaves this house. Have her food and clothing cost nothing?"

"Peace, woman," cried the Moollah Bashi. "Would you rob my dead friend's daughter of her very skin?"

"Ay, that would I," cried the infuriated woman.

At this moment old Nanna Rejab, dressed in her outdoor garments, and wearing her checkered cotton veil, came into the room. "I am only an old serving-woman, O Moollah Bashi, but I and my son Rejab are Bakhtiaris, and we fear no man, not even the Moollah

Bashi of Shiraz. The Khanūm asks for an account—she shall have it. And we too will have an account. Where are the jewels of the Badr-u-Dowlet, O robber of the fatherless?" she cried, addressing the Moollah Bashi's wife. "We will have justice, if we have to tramp barefoot to Teheran to get it. Never fear, my dove," she cried, putting her arm round me affectionately; "go to your room, my child, and don the clothes in which you entered this den of thieves. Praise God, we shall find plenty of friends in Shiraz to prosecute our claim. Were the Kawam's wife in the town, you should be made to disgorge at once, hellcat; and were it not for my lamb here, I would strangle you before your husband's eyes. Dare to lay a finger on either of us and I'll do it," she added, with a menacing gesture.

"She is mad, she is gone crazy," cried the Moollah Bashi's wife.

"A pretty hornet's nest you have brought about our ears, O wife," said the Moollah Bashi in a mournful tone.

"Let them go," cried Zimrūd Khanūm, "that I may be once more mistress in my own house. May my bread which they have eaten choke the pair of them,"

she added, vindictively; and then she took no further notice of us, but began to abuse her unfortunate husband; and I, feeling that there was no other course open to me after what had taken place, did as the old woman had suggested. No one hindered us, and wrapped in the old cotton veil I had worn on the dreadful night of the earthquake, I followed her in silence out of the women's quarters of the Moollah Bashi into the *berūni*, and thence into the street; and there, in the doorway, we found the faithful Rejab leaning on his great iron-headed bludgeon. In this ignominious manner I left the Moollah Bashi's house.

CHAPTER XIV.

POVERTY.

WE three — Nanna Rejab, her son, and I — trudged through the streets of the town, the greater portion of which had been converted into a heap of ruins by the earthquake. When we had reached the very poorest quarter of the city, which lies just within the Jaffirabad gate, Rejab made discreet inquiries for an empty house : we had no sort of difficulty in finding one. We paid down two *kerans*¹ to the landlord, being a fortnight's rent, in advance ; and then the great iron key was handed to Rejab and we took possession of our quarters. The building consisted of a tiny quadrangle some four yards square ; the whole place was built of mud ; it had a little room at either end ; just inside the dark doorway, in a sort of passage leading to the house, was a big

¹ The equivalent of two shillings.

earthen jar holding some twenty gallons, which was intended to contain our daily supply of water. The two little rooms were plastered with mud mixed with straw, and the ceilings were composed of poplar poles covered by brushwood, on which lay the mud that formed the flat outer roof; in one of them was a rough fireplace made in the recess of the wall. One room, the best one, had a hole in it covered with lattice-work, upon which was stuck a sheet of oiled paper: this served as a window. Each room was entered by little folding-doors of rough unpainted wood, and a great heap of rubbish, brickbats, straw, and broken crockery littered the tiny flagged courtyard.

Nanna Rejab deposited her bundle in the room which possessed the window and the fireplace, and then she and I started out into the neighbouring Bazaar to buy furniture and provisions, leaving Rejab, who had already borrowed a broom from a friendly neighbour, to sweep out the entire establishment. It took us a considerable time, in fact the whole of the afternoon, to make our purchases. Old Nanna Rejab chaffered and bargained, and seemed to enjoy herself immensely. This is the full, true, and particular account of our purchases :—

Two well-worn second-hand <i>gelims</i> , or cotton carpets, 9 feet long and 4 feet wide, the colour of which had almost departed from frequent washings ; they were very ragged but very clean. The two	<i>Kerans</i> . 10
Two second-hand copper cooking-pots, having lids which would serve as frying-pans or dishes	8
Three new cotton quilts made of coarsest canvas, which were mattress and covering in one	9
Two chintz-covered pillows stuffed with feathers (a costly luxury this, over which Nanna Rejab hesitated a good deal)	5
A big second-hand iron-bound box and padlock complete	3
One round tray of tinned copper, very much worn, but which had seven <i>kerans</i> ' worth of copper in it, and could be disposed of at any time for that amount	8½
Two water-jars and one water-bottle, and two drinking vessels of porous clay ; three teacups and saucers of commonest pottery—the lot	2
One strong copper kettle	5
One canvas curtain with which to cover the doorway of our woman's apartment	1
A cooking-knife, one chopper, one pair of fire-tongs, four tin plates, two hand-brooms, a zinc water-bottle, a colander and a sieve, and four iron <i>kabab</i> skewers, all very much worn but serviceable	5
One <i>kalian</i> (water-pipe) having a head of black earthenware, a centre and stem of plane-wood dyed crimson, and a water receptacle of coarsest pottery, and 1 lb. of fine tobacco	1½
One live fowl	½
Carry forward	58½

	<i>Kerans.</i>
Brought forward	58½
7 lb. of rice	1
A lump of loaf-sugar	1
¼ lb. of tea	2
Various spices and groceries, lamp-oil, with a lump of rough salt	1
Dried apricots, nuts of several kinds, preserved plums, a dozen pomegranates, 2 lb. of grapes, and a lump of soft white cheese wrapped in a cabbage-leaf	1
Clarified butter	½
One earthen fire-pot (thrown in gratis by the grocer).	
	<hr/> <i>Kerans</i> 64½ ¹

And yet a single porter managed to carry home both food and furniture; and Nanna Rejab invested in a great bundle of sticks and some charcoal for her *kalian*. I wanted to assist her in carrying them, whereat she was most indignant.

"You! you carry anything, my lamb! By my son's death I swear that you shall do nothing of the sort: little lady, whose dog do you take me for?"

"You forget, you dear old thing," I said, "that I am no longer a little lady—that I am merely Nissa the sister of Rejab, and your daughter. As we begin, Nanna" (Mother), I said, affectionately, "so we must go on, if

¹ *Kerans* 64 = £3, 3s. of our money.

we are to escape from the persecutions of the Moollah Bashi's wife."

"You are right, O my daughter," said the old woman, taking the hint,—“you are quite right, and I was a fool;” and then she surrendered to me the little bag of charcoal.

When we reached our home at last, the old woman rewarded the porter, who had been on his feet at least a couple of hours, with the sum of twopence-halfpenny.

"You are economical, little mothers," he said, as he wiped the sweat from his forehead with his shirt-sleeve. "After all, you are very welcome, for if we poor people didn't help each other, I don't know what would become of us."

And then Nanna Rejab handed one of our pomegranates to the good-natured porter, who accepted the gift with a great smile, and tossing it up in the air, wished us good luck in our new quarters, and then departed. We found the little house looking none the worse for Rejab's labours: the tiny rooms had been cleared of dust, cobwebs, and ashes, and they, as well as the little courtyard, had been well swept and sprinkled with water. So we barred the heavy outer door, and had great fun in laying our carpets, nailing up our one cur-

tain, lighting a fire, and the preparations for the evening meal. As soon as we had set our biggest cooking-pot full of water upon the fire, the copper kettle was got under way, and Nanna Rejab brewed the tea in it. I washed the teacups and arranged them on the copper tray, and broke up the big bit of sugar into suitable lumps, with which I filled a little basin. Then we seated ourselves upon our carpet and partook of a cup of tea; and Rejab, who had filled and lighted the water-pipe, came to the doorway and respectfully handed it to his mother, who sat and smoked eagerly for several minutes. Then she handed her son a cup of sweet hot tea, which he decorously took away to his own room on the other side of the courtyard, and discussed it there, after which he finished what tobacco remained in the water-pipe. Ever since I had first known him, Rejab had always been excessively respectful to me, and, strange to say, now that I was brought to poverty, though I was a foreigner and an Unbeliever, his deference was, if possible, still more strongly marked. Though to our neighbours I was his sister, yet the young fellow would never look me in the face, and never address me save as "Lady" or "Dear lady." Mother and son waited upon me at my meals, and only when I had finished would they consent

to eat, and this, though I often remonstrated, they would never do in my presence.

And now, the water in the great cooking-pot being hot, the old woman dipped the fowl, which Rejab had killed, into it, and by a dexterous turn of the hand the bird's feathers disappeared as if by magic, no plucking being required; and I sat and cleaned the rice, freeing it from tiny stones, husks, and damaged grains; and then the old woman deftly shook it into boiling water and set it on the fire to cook by the side of the fowl, now simmering away merrily. And then we lighted the big earthen lamp, having filled it with oil extracted from the castor-oil plant; and we scalded some raisins, and then fried some finely-chopped onions, till they were a bright brown, in a little clarified butter, and then we fried the raisins till they were swollen and brown, and the butter in which they had been fried had assumed a rich brown colour. Meanwhile Rejab ran out into the Bazaar, whence he almost immediately returned bearing a clean cloth in which was carefully wrapped a huge flap of native bread, piping hot from the oven; and in the centre of the flap of hot folded bread lay six little strips of very finely minced and pounded meat, already spiced and flavoured with herbs with just a suspicion of

garlic, and then delicately toasted to a pale brown over a fierce charcoal fire: finally they had been sprinkled with dried pounded sorrel, and a handful of fresh mint accompanied them. Such is the Persian *kabab* of the Bazaar, which is eaten with equal gusto by rich and poor alike. The customer orders his one or more skewers of *kabab* from the *kababjee*, and pays for them at the rate of a farthing each; then he marches off to the baker's and gets a flap of hot bread, weighing two pounds, which costs him another farthing. Meanwhile the *kababjee* has placed the one or more broad iron skewers, covered with the paste of pounded meat, over his little furnace of fiercely burning charcoal, and, fanning the fire briskly the while, he quickly turns the skewers; and when the customer arrives with his flap of hot bread, the *kababjee* lays the *kababs* side by side upon it, and with a scientific twist removes the skewers. Then the bread is folded over the delicacy, which serves to keep it hot for a long while; the *kababjee* hands the customer a little bunch of fresh green mint, with a low bow: and in this way a Persian can obtain, at any hour of the day, a delicious, freshly cooked, and specially prepared meal for the sum of a halfpenny, *but it must be eaten hot*. It must be remembered that prime mutton in Persia only

costs twopence a pound. And while I was falling to with a good appetite upon the *kababs*, Nanna Rejab placed the fowl, so thoroughly boiled as to crumble at the slightest touch, upon a big round plate of coarse earthenware, and covering the fowl with a mound of white and steaming rice, she crowned its summit with the crisply fried raisins and onions, finishing the process by pouring over the completed dish a small quantity of the richly browned butter : this is the *pillau*, or national dish of Persia, which appears nightly at the dinners of the well-to-do, and generally once a-week is seen as a luxury at the meals of the poorer classes. In one of our blue-glazed earthenware bowls Rejab had obtained for a halfpenny half a gill of *sircanjabine*, which is honey flavoured with white-wine vinegar and boiled till it assumes the consistence of syrup. I filled the bowl up with water, pouring it from a height and stirring the mixture the while, and so a couple of quarts of deliciously sweet, cool sherbet, with a sub-acid flavour, is prepared. And when dinner was over Nanna Rejab set out a sort of dessert consisting of two varieties of delicious grapes, a little piece of the soft white cheese, some nuts in a saucer, and another saucer containing what looked like a heap of rubies and topazes, but

which was, after all, nothing but the prepared contents of two pomegranates of different varieties; and then she retired to dine with her son, in the other little room, on what was left, leaving me to my meditations.

When she returned, it being wellnigh three hours after sunset, she barred the door of our little room, and we retired to rest; and I couldn't help feeling safer and happier than I had ever done in the house of the Moollah Bashi.

I was awakened in the morning by the old woman, who brought me the usual cup of tea; and as I sleepily rubbed my eyes, I gazed upon my new surroundings with some astonishment. Then I remembered my sudden change of position, how I was no longer the step-daughter of her Excellency the Badr-u-Dowlet, but simply Nissa the sister of Rejab. I looked out into the little courtyard, which had again been swept and sprinkled, and I inquired after Rejab.

"He has gone to look for work," said his mother, simply. "He is sure to get it, for, *Mashallah!* my son Rejab is a strong fellow, and there is plenty of work to be had for the asking now in Shiraz, for, since the earthquake, every man whose house was ruined is rebuilding it; and Rejab will earn at least a *keran* a-day and his breakfast, as a labourer, though I never thought

to see my son a common *fellah*,"¹ said the old woman, with a sigh. "You see, we Bakhtiaris seldom do manual labour save in connection with our flocks and herds. Our strong men, like my son Rejab, will sally forth occasionally when there is a caravan to be plundered, or a piece of honest fighting to be done; but they don't work as a rule—they are too proud for that."

"And your son has to work as a *fellah* on my account, Nanna?" I said. "Is there no work that I can do? can't I try to earn something?"

"You work! you!" cried the old woman in horror. "You work for money! God forbid that you should ever disgrace your honourable fingers by such a thing. You are my daughter now," said the old woman, with a little laugh, "my little Nissa. Never be afraid, my soul; my son Rejab will be only too delighted to work for the pair of us. And in his breakfast hour at noon he is sure to run in to see if we want anything. Ah, he is a good son," added the old woman, proudly.

And so I was to live idle with a servant of my own, and be supported by the toil of the poor old woman and her son. I couldn't bear the thought of it, but at present there was no other course open to me. I had no re-

¹ *Fellah*, a day-labourer who undertakes any kind of work.

sources; the gold bracelet that my stepmother had given me had mysteriously disappeared during my stay in the Moollah Bashi's house. True, I still had the little golden brooch that Mr Reece had given me, but somehow or other I felt that I could never part with this save in the direst emergency, for I had begun to look upon it as a sort of talisman, the last link that connected me with Europe and civilisation. My only hope of escaping from my present painful situation was to communicate with Miss Methuen, obtain the necessary funds from her, and so return to England and earn my living as a teacher; but in those days it took several months even to get a letter to England: that I felt was my only course, for I could not consent to remain a burden to the two poor people who had been so kind to me. No, there was no other way open to me, unless I chose to return to the house of the Moollah Bashi, in order to become the wife of Mirza Jaffer, the Cross-Eyed. So I resolved to attempt to communicate with Miss Methuen at once, and I wondered that the idea had never crossed my mind before.

At his breakfast hour poor Rejab appeared. I hardly knew him,—he seemed in a pitiable plight. He had nothing on but a pair of blue cotton *shulwar* (drawers) tucked up high above his knees, and a shirt of the same

material ; he was covered with dust and little bits of cut straw, and he was a mass of mud and straw, which had dried in the sun upon his legs, to the knees. And then his mother explained to me that he had been engaged the whole morning in treading a heap of mud and cut straw, and so preparing it for use in the plastering of a wall ; and the sight of him made me feel more than ever what a useless helpless creature I was.

"Forgive me, Khanūm," he said ; "I'll manage to look decent when I return home in the evening."

"It is I who have to ask your pardon, brother Rejab," I said, a remark that made his poor old mother very angry indeed.

"Don't try to make a fool of the boy, Khanūm," she whispered ; "he is young and foolish, and the Bakhtiari blood which runs in his veins is far too inflammable to need your putting a light to it."

And then she angrily bade him be off and get his breakfast, and not stand idling there.

An hour after sunset, Rejab, washed and presentable, made his appearance. He placed a silver *keran* in his mother's hand without a word, then walked to his own little room, and then flinging himself down upon his strip of carpet, slept like a tired dog.

CHAPTER XV.

A CRIME.

I NOW wrote a very long letter indeed to England, to my dear old friend Miss Methuen. I told her of my poor father's dreadful death, and how, through no fault of my own, I found myself in Persia penniless and alone; and I begged her, for the sake of old times, to assist me to return to England: and I promised to repay the loan by helping her in her little school. It was rather a queer-looking letter when it was finished: it was written upon native paper, which resembled vellum in appearance, with a reed pen, in Chinese ink; the envelope was of home manufacture—in fact I had fashioned it with a pair of scissors. I addressed the letter to the care of the English Minister in Teheran, and Rejab took it himself to the house of the British Agent, a Persian nobleman of Shiraz.

And now it struck me that it would be as well to examine the little pocket-book which my father had intrusted to me on the fatal night of the earthquake. There were some thirty documents in all. The first one, which was written on very beautiful paper in the substance of which appeared numerous flakes of gold-leaf, turned out to be a Royal *firman*, and bore the King's seal at the top of it: it contained my father's appointment as Chief of the Powder Factory at Shiraz. Then there were five little pieces of paper in an envelope: these had evidently been frequently perused, and many of the sentences were written in red ink. They were little bits of paper the size of a playing-card: there was no doubt of their nature, for the envelope that contained them was endorsed, "My Jemileh's letters." In the envelope was also a faded rose. The rest of the papers all referred to money: most of them bore several seals, stamped in ink, and each had on its back one large square seal, which, with some difficulty, I made out to be that of Houssein Khan Nawab, British Agent at Shiraz; and above this seal was invariably written in Persian the word "Registered." It was evident to me that my father had considered the contents of this pocket-book of great importance, and I determined to

secretly seek the assistance of the British Agent in deciphering these papers. I was afraid to go to him openly, for I feared that I should be handed over to the tender mercies of the Moollah Bashi's wife, upon the strength of the forged paper that I knew her husband held appointing him my guardian, and to which my father's seal had been fraudulently affixed after his death. I was really afraid to go to his house lest Rejab or his mother, who would have to accompany me, might be recognised by any of the Moollah Bashi's servants, for the house of the British Agent was in the immediate neighbourhood of that of the Moollah Bashi.

It was now more than a month since I had left the Moollah Bashi's house, and Nanna Rejab had ascertained that though the High Priest had at first made great efforts to discover my whereabouts, I was now supposed to have fled in the direction of the Persian Gulf; and nothing having been heard of me, the Chief Priest's lady had come to the pleasing conclusion that I had been knocked on the head by one of the innumerable bands of Bakhtiari robbers who at this time infested the neighbourhood of the city. The fact is that the wish on the lady's part was probably father to the thought,—nothing could suit her better than to be left in undisturbed pos-

session of my stepmother's jewels; so after the first excitement of my flight had subsided, she had made no further inquiries about me.

Our humble neighbours, of whom we saw next to nothing, didn't trouble themselves as to our antecedents. Rejab, the *fellah*, excited no remark in that poor neighbourhood; to their minds he was simply a young man who earned his *keran* a-day, and supported his mother and sister upon it. When we two women went out into the Bazaar we were of course veiled, and as all veils are alike, there was nothing to distinguish us from other women of the lower class. The few mistakes I made in speech were put down to the supposed fact of my being a Bakhtiari, and I was only known by a few of our neighbour's wives and daughters as Nissa, the sister of Rejab.

How Mirza Jaffer, the Cross-Eyed, managed to discover our retreat I have never known; but Nanna Rejab came back one day in great excitement from the Bazaar, and declared that he had been making inquiries about us from the grocer at the corner. About two o'clock in the afternoon of the next day we heard a modest knock upon the outer door. I ran to open it. A veiled woman, poorly dressed, stood there and inquired in tones which

seemed not unfamiliar to me, if Rejab the *fellah* was at home; and on my replying that he was away at his work, the woman asked if she could see his mother. I, supposing she was one of our neighbours, invited her to enter, and fastening the outer door, ushered her at once into our little living-room.

"What may you please to want?" said Rejab's mother.

"Don't you know me, my child?" cried the Moollah Bashi's wife, for she it was, ignoring the old woman and seating herself upon our ragged carpet and throwing back her veil. "You've brought your sheep to a pretty market, Madge Khanūm," she said to me. "You prefer love in a cottage with a good-looking young thief of a Bakhtiari to my son Jaffer. Ah, shameless one," she added, with a laugh, "I suppose you were secretly married to him all the while. Oh! if her Excellency the Badr-u-Dowlet could only see her stepdaughter now! Well, Madge Khanūm, I suppose it's no use crying over spilt milk," said The Monkey, with affected good-nature. "Mirza Jaffer couldn't marry you now, if he wanted to, after such a scandal as this. People said you were dead, you know, my soul," she went on; "it's very much the same thing—in fact you are dead and buried too, my dear. If

I can be of any use to you, my good woman," she continued, still addressing me, "I shall be delighted. If you would like to earn money as a seamstress, I will give you work: only name it, and anything in reason that I can do for you I will."

The wretch was evidently exulting over my poverty.

It wasn't respect for the Moollah Bashi's lady that kept Nanna Rejab silent,—she had not risen when she found that her visitor was the Chief Priest's wife,—it was simply that she couldn't trust herself, and I was too much astonished and frightened to say anything.

"You are not very hospitable, Madge Khanūm," continued The Monkey, "you don't offer me a *kalian*; and it is very foolish of you to attempt to quarrel with me, child. You don't even suggest a cup of tea. Where is your hospitality, O wife of Rejab? Your poverty needn't make you rude, you know," she added, tartly.

And now Nanna Rejab got up and carefully prepared and filled the *kalian*, which she at length handed to my unwelcome guest; and then she proceeded to put the kettle upon the fire of sticks and to make tea in the kettle itself, as is the custom among the poor in Persia. And then the Moollah Bashi's wife began to attempt to amuse me with small talk.

"My Jaffer was really very fond of you, O wife of Rejab," she said. "He lost his appetite altogether for a whole week, poor fellow; but he has consoled himself at last, and I am happy to tell you that he is engaged to be married, and the wedding is to take place in a month or two. What on earth made you come to live in this horrible quarter of the town, child?" she continued.

"Beggars can't afford to be choosers," I replied, finding my tongue at last.

"Oh, you've found that out, have you?" she said, with a laugh. "There's nothing like poverty to bring foolish people to their senses. And if you really have repented of your folly and wickedness, child, you can't do better than divorce him, and when you've done that, I'll try to get you a place in Mirza Jaffer's household, if you like."

I thanked her, I actually thanked her, what else could I do, for I felt that it was not worth while to attempt to disabuse her mind as to my supposed marriage with Rejab. That extraordinary theory in her eyes evidently finally disposed of me, and I fancied that by silently accepting it we should probably remain unmolested.

"You may thank your stars that I am your friend," went on the High Priest's lady, as she took the cup of

tea which Nanna Rejab handed her, "for were I to betray you to the Moollah Bashi, my husband, he would assuredly cause that handsome Rejab of yours to be bastinadoed to death for having dared to run away with his ward. But your secret is quite safe, my child. What shocking tea!" she continued; "I don't remember ever to have drunk such atrocious tea in the whole course of my life."

The old woman was out in the courtyard at this moment, engaged in refilling the *kalian*.

"The fact is," said my visitor, "that I have let my tea get cold," and she suddenly sprang to her feet, emptied the remainder of her tea into the ashes of the fire, and then poured herself out a second cup: then she lifted the lid of the little kettle and appeared to be examining its contents. "Why, it's the commonest of common tea, child," she cried, standing with her back to me as she closed the lid and replaced the kettle in the hot ashes. "You've been the victim of that horrid old woman," she said in a whisper, when she had resumed her place. "I'm extremely sorry for you, Madge Khanūm," she added, and there was a malicious twinkle in her eye; and then she took the *kalian* which Nanna Rejab now brought into the room, and smoked it with great complacency.

Just then the call for afternoon prayer resounded from the minaret of the neighbouring Mosque.

The Moollah Bashi's wife rose hurriedly.

"I must be off," she said; "I'd no idea I had stopped so long. I came alone and unattended, you see, disguised in this shabby veil, and your neighbourhood is rather an awkward quarter for a lady to pass through. Good-bye, child; remember that you always have a friend in me," and then she offered to embrace me, but I declined the proffered caress. "Conduct me to the door, child," she said coldly, taking not the slightest notice of Rejab's mother. "I won't betray you, little victim of love, though I can't say I admire your choice," she added. "Farewell, child, may your footsteps be fortunate," she cried, when we reached the door. And so the woman who had stolen my stepmother's jewels took her leave.

"She has found us out," said Nanna Rejab, as she poured herself out a cup of tea, "and she will play us some devil's trick before she has done with us, my lamb, may her soul perish in eternal fires! But she was quite right, the tea is horrible," she said, as, making a wry face, she finished the cup.

"It seemed much as usual to me, Nanna Rejab," I replied.

And then we sat and talked over The Monkey's visit, and we laughed at her jumping to the conclusion that I had eloped with poor Rejab.

"Nobody but a beast of the field would have dared to suggest such a thing," cried the old woman.

"Mother," I said, "it is not right that I should stay here to be a burden upon you and your son. She knows now of my presence here; we had better go at once to the British Agent, that I may place myself under his protection."

Nanna Rejab did not attempt to combat this suggestion.

All at once the poor old woman's face grew pale, and her whole frame was shaken by a violent spasm; her agony increased every moment, and then she suddenly smote her head with her hand. "Run, child, run to the apothecary's for an emetic. I am poisoned; I know it but too well. Thank God *you* have escaped, because you have not tasted her accursed brew!"

And then the whole thing flashed upon me. When the Moollah Bashi's wife had inspected the kettle, she must have poisoned its contents. I said no word, but snatching up my veil ran with all speed to the neighbouring apothecary's. I purchased the emetic, and chancing upon a *hakim*, or native doctor, who was

sitting in the apothecary's shop, I brought him back with me. When we reached the house the poor old woman was speechless, and evidently sinking rapidly. The *hakim* attempted to administer the emetic, but Nanna Rejab was unable to swallow it; then, shaking his head, he asked me what she had last partaken of.

I pointed to the kettle.

The *hakim* poured out a little of the tea into a saucer, tasted it, and shook his head.

"Give me some milk," he said.

I did as I was bid, and he filled up the saucer with it.

As I sat at the old woman's head, with her cold hand in mine, and tried to comfort her, I could see that her face was ever and anon distorted by the agony she was evidently undergoing; but she uttered no single word of complaint, though she surely knew only too well that her end was fast approaching.

"Ah! if we only knew where he was working," she said wearily, at last, "then we might send for him. O God! O Mortazza Ali! grant that I may see my boy before I die. Oh, give me strength to live till he returns! O learned doctor, my son shall give you a present of a gold *toman*, and my clothes will fetch

that—indeed they will—if only you will keep me alive till Rejab comes back!”

But the doctor only shook his head.

“O God!” she said, with a low wail, “it isn’t much to ask, O Merciful One!”

As I looked in the doctor’s face I could see that, in his opinion, she was a doomed woman, and that there was no hope. The *hakim* sat by the window perfectly motionless, holding a bit of bread in his hand, and ever and anon he softly cried, “Puss, puss, puss.” Perhaps he was attempting, I thought, to perform some strange incantation, in which all Persians are believers, feeling that the case was beyond human skill. I knew that the promise of a *toman* was quite sufficient incentive to him to do all he could, but his strange proceedings puzzled me.

Just then one of the lean and hungry cats with which Persian towns are infested made its appearance in our little courtyard. The doctor flung a tiny piece of bread to it; this the animal pounced upon and greedily devoured; and then he placed the saucer in the open doorway, calling the animal gently. The cat ran to the saucer at once and lapped up the contents in a moment.

"Puss, poor puss!" said the doctor, as he fondled the animal. "Cat of my soul," he added, as he continued to caress the beast. "We shall soon know now," he went on sententiously, addressing his patient in a low whisper.

Suddenly the cat rolled upon the floor in violent convulsions, and in a few minutes it was dead!

"Who gave you the tea, mother?" cried the doctor, in an excited tone.

"That is our business, O man!" replied the old woman. "Meddle not with what does not concern you. We have had a visit from an enemy — an enemy who would have poisoned the pair of us."

"An enemy who must pay the penalty," said the doctor, excitedly.

"Our enemy is above the law," said the old woman, bitterly. "But I shall not die unavenged," she added, with a dreadful smile, "for I hear the footsteps of my son, my dear son Rejab, and we are Bakhtiaris, and with us the Avenger of Blood does not tarry."

And then Rejab entered the courtyard, and when he saw his mother lying there by the open doorway he rushed into the room and cried out excitedly—

"What is this, O doctor?"

"It is poison, O man," replied the *hakim*, pointing to the dead body of the cat.

"O my son! O my dear son Rejab!" cried his dying mother, "God has been good to me in letting me see you, O Rejab, before I die. We have had a visit from the Moollah Bashi's wife," she added in a low whisper, "and this is her doing. Thank God, my lamb, the little lady, has escaped her. Kiss me, O my son," she added in a louder tone, "that I may bless you before I die. And I do bless you, O son of my husband; and God and the blessed *Imams* will guard you, O my Rejab, for you are a good Mussulman, and a good son, O Rejab; and you will watch over our little lady for my sake, and for our dear dead master's sake,"—and then she laid her hands upon his head and kissed him; and then her head fell back once more upon her pillow, and we sat there by her side, each holding an icy hand of the dying woman. And then she smiled as she repeated the dying Mussulman's profession of faith—

"There is no god but God : Mohammed is the Prophet of God."

And so she died; and as she died she smiled upon us both.

And the *hakim* stood in the centre of the room, and raising his hands to Heaven cried, "Alláh! There is no strength nor power but in God. To God we belong; and to Him we must return! God have mercy on her."

And then Rejab rent his ragged clothes, and wept and cried aloud; and I also wept bitterly, for I knew that I had lost a faithful friend and protector: the *hakim*, too, shed a few perfunctory tears.

"Peace be with you, O my son," he said at length, wiping his eyes with the back of his hand. "You owe me one gold *toman*,—your sister here is a witness to that contract. Had it not been for me, you would not have obtained your mother's blessing, and assuredly a mother's blessing is cheap at a gold *toman*."

Rejab didn't answer him, but continued his wailings and lamentations.

"Peace unto this house," said the doctor; "I go to summon the washers of the dead."

CHAPTER XVI.

I OBTAIN PROTECTION.

AT early dawn the next morning I and Rejab, with a few of the women among our neighbours, followed the little wooden bier, hired from the adjacent mosque, in which lay, shrouded in a few yards of coarsest calico, the body of my poor old nurse. We were too poor to afford even a coffin. I had offered my little golden rose to Rejab to help to pay for his mother's burial.

"It can't be, lady. The little I have will bury my mother, and pay for the funeral meal I must give to our neighbours. And when we've buried her, I'll take you straight to Houssein Khan the British Agent's house."

I felt that there was no more to be said, for it was evidently a point of honour with the poor young fellow to defray all the funeral charges out of his slender means; and, of course, now that my dear old friend was

gone, it was impossible for me to remain alone in the little house near the Jaffirabad gate.

All through the night our female neighbours had sat watching and wailing by the body of the dead woman, which lay swathed like a mummy upon a door which had been taken off its hinges and placed upon the floor. Rejab much regretted that his poverty prevented him from obtaining at least one professional mourner; but a ragged priest, seated in the courtyard, droned out passages from the Koran; and our female neighbours, who were now our guests, wept and wailed at intervals all through the long night; and I waited on them and regaled them with tea and sweetmeats.

It was what we should term in England a walking funeral of the poorest class. Rejab and I and some half-dozen of our neighbours, the men in one group, the women in another, followed the little bier of plane-wood; and ever and anon, to my great astonishment, the passers-by would volunteer as bearers; and when they yielded up their places to others anxious to lend a hand, they generally joined our little procession in its march towards the great burial-ground outside the town.

The vast cemetery was simply a great piece of waste land used as a burial-ground: there was no attempt at

making this City of the Dead beautiful,—no broad expanse of turf or gravelled walks, and not a tree in sight. The ground was uneven and bare, and the yellow sun-baked earth was sprinkled with flints, boulders, and broken tombstones; there was not the least sign of vegetation in this howling wilderness, not even a single blade of grass, and the place seemed to cover a square mile; there were no walls or gates, and the Shah's high-road ran through the middle. Here and there, perhaps some twenty altogether, were dotted about small domes built of mud bricks, each standing upon four square pillars of the same material: these, I knew, marked the graves of priests or holy men. There were thousands of little slabs of stone, lying flat upon the ground, on which were recorded the names of the dead, with a pious invocation or a text from the Koran; but the great majority of the graves were merely marked by a couple of square bricks set into the earth edgeways, one at the head, another at the foot; and one could perceive which were the more recent ones, for they were generally marked out by a single row of stones, taken up haphazard and placed there by the mourners. I could perceive, too, some half-dozen little tents dotted about in the immense cemetery; in front of each was seated a ragged

priest, who was reading the Koran over the grave of some person of means recently deceased. And here and there were rudely carved stone figures of lions, which, as I knew, marked the resting-places of warriors slain in battle; and I noticed, too, an occasional little wall of brickwork, a yard high and a couple of feet wide, covered with white plaster, on which were painted rude representations of gaily-dressed young men, generally mounted, and strange caricatures of greyhounds and hawks—these marked the graves of young men who had passed away in the flower of their youth. There were holes and great rifts in the earth, which, as I knew, gave shelter to hyenas, jackals, and porcupines, and in which dwelt the Persian badger, termed the *goorkan* or “gravedigger.”

At length we came to the grave, which was a hole some two feet in depth, at which stood one of Rejab's fellow-workmen leaning on a spade; and for a few minutes we sat by it, and rested after our long walk. And then one of the ragged priests, who had sauntered up, scenting a job, recited a very short prayer, which we all repeated after him. And then Rejab and one of our neighbours lifted the shrouded body from the little wooden bier and placed it in the grave, and now Rejab and the priest unknotted the end of the

winding-sheet. The tears were streaming down the poor fellow's face as he did it, and I, too, wept bitterly for the dead woman, who had been as a mother to me. And then the priest intoned another prayer, the Prophet and the twelve *Imams* were invoked, and the Mussulman's profession of faith recited; and then, at a sign from the priest, Rejab seized the spade and hurriedly filled in the shallow grave. Then a little water was sprinkled over the fresh earth; a couple of old bricks, taken from a neighbouring grave, were stuck into the ground edgeways as head- and foot-stones, and we mourners placed a row of pebbles round the little mound. Rejab put a silver *keran* in the hands of the priest, who was kneeling at the head of the grave, and then the little funeral party hurried back towards the town, Rejab and the men walking in front, while I followed with the women, who attempted to console me with formal professions of sympathy and philosophical remarks, such as: "After all, she was an old woman; she had lived her life." "Was she not a widow, and too old and too poor to have hoped to marry again?" "Praise God, she had lived her life and has left a son. What more could a woman desire?" "Eat this bit of *gez* (*nougat*), my child; it is flavoured with almonds and

pistachios. There is nothing so consoling in these sad circumstances as a bit of good *gez*," said one well-meaning old woman, as she attempted to thrust a lump of the sticky sweetmeat into my unwilling mouth.

When we reached the house, as was the custom we entertained those who had followed the deceased to the grave with tea, *kaliens*, sweetmeats, and a very substantial breakfast. I waited upon the women in one room, Rejab upon the men in the other, and we both had our hands very full indeed. And when the dismal entertainment was over, and the pipe of farewell had been smoked, each of the women kissed me and bade me farewell.

"Don't grieve, little Nissa. *Mashallah!* you are young and good-looking. Don't spoil your pretty eyes, my child. God be with you!" said one of the friendly women.

And then our sympathisers all filed out of the little courtyard, and Rejab and I were left alone.

I am not quite sure, when I come to look back upon it, that these strange and hurried funeral rites, poor and simple though they were, are not better for everybody than the long and melancholy ceremonials which are the custom in Europe.

“Khanūm” (lady), said Rejab to me, when the last of the mourners had departed, as he made me a low obeisance, “this is no place for you. Allow me to respectfully represent that it is fitting you should take refuge at once in the house of some great personage, for, unfortunately, circumstances do not permit at present of your engaging female servants of your own. And I have something to do before daybreak—something that must be done,” he added, mysteriously.

I hardly noticed his words. At the time I didn't dream of their dreadful import. And then I told him that I had quite made up my mind to place myself and my affairs in the hands of the British Agent.

“There is wisdom at times even in the words of women,” he remarked, sententiously. “You have judged rightly, O Khanūm,” he said; “you will do well to put yourself under the shadow of his Excellency at once. Praise God, he is a just man, and no man dare molest him; for is he not the representative of the *Kūmpanee*¹ and the British Government. By the time we reach his house he will have finished his siesta, and is sure to receive you at once; for are you not a British subject and the daughter of Methuen Beg, my dear master?

¹ *Kūmpanee*—i.e., the East India Company.

Let us set forth, O Khanūm, before the accursed wife of the Chief Priest shall attempt to secure your person, for she still lives—the accursed woman!—she still lives,” he added, savagely, spitting upon the ground.

I hardly noticed his words, so terrified was I at the imminence of my danger; for then, and then only, did I realise that, if I fell into the hands of the Moollah Bashi's wife, I should be assuredly compelled to marry the hateful Mirza Jaffer. I hurriedly put on my shabby veil and the rest of my walking dress, and then, preceded by Rejab, armed with his big iron-headed stick, I hastened in the direction of the house of Houssein Khan Nawab,¹ the British Agent. We found it no very easy matter to gain admittance.

“We have a representation to make to his Excellency,” said Rejab, addressing the doorkeeper.

“Then come and make it to-morrow,” replied that well-dressed, well-fed servant. “His Excellency has ridden out to meet a Sahib—a Sahib I say—a distinguished servant of the mighty English Government. Come to-morrow, come the day after; and don't come empty-handed, my man,” said the porter, patronisingly;

¹ *Nawab*, an Indian title held by several Persian noblemen of Indian extraction.

"for how am I to give notice of your High Mightinesses' arrival," said the porter, sarcastically, "unless my palm is greased?"

"O Prince of Porters," replied Rejab, "why should not my sister make her petition to his Excellency's ladies?" and then he thrust half a silver *keran* into the porter's willing hand.

"Why not?" said the porter, with a smile. "His Excellency's daughter is now, as ever, the protector of the poor." Then he raised a heavy canvas curtain and shouted out, "Ho! Almaz, Almaz."

And then a well-dressed and sleepy-looking black boy appeared, rubbing his eyes.

"Almaz, most beautiful of all black boys," said the porter, "here's a young woman who wants to speak to your mistress."

"What's your business, little mother?" said the boy. "I can't disturb my lady unless your business is urgent."

"It's a message, it's a message," I blurted out, "a message from the daughter of Methuen Beg."

"Don't mock me," said the black boy, sulkily; "Methuen Beg's daughter ran away from the Moollah Bashi's house, whose ward she was, and was robbed

and murdered by the Bakhtiaris long ago: she is dead. How can you have a message from the dead?"

"I have a message from the dead, though," I said, firmly, "and I must deliver it, my good Almaz."

"Your good Almaz," cried the black boy, sulkily. "I don't like messages from the dead, they are unlucky," he added, inconsequently.

"Go and tell your mistress that I am here, boy," I said, with an attempt at dignity, "or you may find the soles of your feet higher than your head before many hours are over."

This mysterious threat, which had reference to the bastinado, had an extraordinary effect upon the black boy, who disappeared down the dark passage behind the curtain, with a smothered exclamation at my astonishing impudence. He soon returned.

"Dilaram Khanūm will see you, my girl," he said, sulkily.

I followed him through the dark passage and across a beautiful courtyard, whose sunken flower-beds were filled with bushes of the Marvel of Peru laden with flowers of all the colours of the rainbow; and there were great orange-trees, on which hung a profusion of dark-green fruit. The doors and windows were gay

with paint and gilding; the walls were of elaborately ornamented varnished plaster-work, which shone like polished white marble; and at an open window, a yard from the ground, behind a little ornamental tank in which a fountain played, sat a young lady, beautifully dressed, of the purest type of oriental loveliness. She held a little inlaid lute of satin-wood in her hand, and ever and anon she ran her taper fingers over its silver wires.

The black boy made a low bow. "This is the woman who says she has a message, O Excellency," he said, respectfully.

"What is your message, child?" said the lady, carelessly. "The Badr-u-Dowlet's stepdaughter is dead, as you should know by this time," she added.

"My message is for your private ear, lady," I replied.

"Go, Almaz," said the lady, with an impatient wave of the hand, "bring me my pipe. Now, child," said Dilaram Khanūm, "out with your message—we are alone."

"May it please you," I said, respectfully, "*I* am the stepdaughter of the Badr-u-Dowlet."

"What!" cried the beautiful lady, starting to her feet in her astonishment, and so exhibiting a skirt of

palest blue satin heavily trimmed with gold-lace from Constantinople, and a pair of exceedingly white and shapely ankles and feet,—“what, you ! and in those rags ? Even *Feringhis*¹ don't come back from the grave, child ; it is a lie—of course it is. If you want alms, ask for them properly, but don't attempt to hoax me with fairy tales, little mother.”

“Do I look like a Persian girl ?” I cried indignantly, raising my veil. “The rags which you see, I was compelled to wear in order to escape from the persecutions of the Moollah Bashi's wife, whose husband falsely declared I was his ward ; and I have come to ask you for justice—justice and protection.”

“It is very evident, my soul, that you are no Persian,” said the lady, “or you would not ask for justice against the Moollah Bashi. But, praise God, in this house we fear no man, not even the Imam Juma, the Prince-Governor, or the Shah himself. I, too, am a British subject, and there is nothing my father the Nawab won't do for you, for he and his fathers before him have eaten the *Kūmpanee's* salt for many years. Never mind your rags, my darling, ‘the roughest shell often contains the sweetest kernel.’ Come then into my

¹ *Feringhi*, a European.

room, O lady, that I may receive you as you deserve. And so you are an Englishwoman, a real Englishwoman ! I have always longed to see a real Englishwoman. It is strange that we have never met ; but your father was a great friend of the Moollah Bashi's, and my father the Nawab and the Moollah Bashi have been at daggers drawn for years ; and then, you know, your stepmother, the Badr-u-Dowlet, did give herself airs, and so I took care never to meet her, because she would have insisted on taking precedence of me, which is nonsense of course, for after all my father's grandfather was an Indian Nawab, a sovereign prince. And then, you know, I always supposed," she ran on, "that you were a half-caste, and that your mother was a Persian—and all half-castes are horrid. There's the Elkhani's wife, she's an Afghan, and their children are like baboons. Ba ! ba ! ba !" she cried ; "when one looks at them one expects to see them turn head over heels. And there's Isfendiar Khan, he married an Armenian, and his two daughters have the finest heads of hair in Shiraz, and the biggest eyes ; but their feet, their dreadful feet, I tremble when I think of their feet—they're stupendous. But you, *Mashallah*, are a real Englishwoman, a pure-blooded Englishwoman,

a girl who has had the good luck to have been taught all the arts and sciences of the West; who has learned geography and history, and to play on all kinds of musical instruments, and who can dance and sing, and who has seen all the wonders of the cities of the West; and who has travelled upon the iron-roads and in smoke-ships,¹ and has ridden in a balloon, and has gone a-hunting, sitting sideways upon a horse. And what makes it more particularly delightful is, that you talk Persian so beautifully: yours isn't high-class Persian, you know, my dear, but you've got a charming little Shiraz accent which makes you perfectly irresistible."

And then the Nawab's daughter made me seat myself by her side, and she patted my hand affectionately, and even kissed me,—“And you know, my pigeon, there'll be nothing to be afraid of here. As for your having no money, that won't matter the least little bit, because you are so pretty, you know, and because, after all, you are the stepdaughter of the Badr-u-Dowlet. Why, child, when you are properly dressed—and my wardrobe is entirely at your disposal, and I can lend you any amount

¹ Steamers are called smoke-ships, and railways iron-roads, by the Persians.

of lovely jewellery—and when you've been to the bath, and had your hair and finger-tips properly dyed with henna,—why, all you'll have to do will be to throw the handkerchief, and you can marry anybody; and the Nawab, my father, would see that the settlements are all right, and that you get a proper establishment. Your eyes are a little small of course, my dear, and they're a strange colour; I have never seen eyes of that colour before," she said, staring me almost out of countenance. "But never mind your eyes—they show that you are a full-blooded Englishwoman; and you've a deliciously rounded chin, and a little rosebud of a mouth; and as for those charming teeth of yours which you show so prettily when you smile, they're like a double string of Bahrein pearls, they are indeed; and when you've the slightest suspicion of rouge upon your cheeks, and those long eyelashes of yours are just touched up with *kohl*,¹ you'll be a *houri*, my angel, a perfect *houri*; and I shouldn't be a bit surprised," she added a little nervously, "if papa himself were to marry you,—he's always raving about the English ladies he saw when he was in Bombay,—and then we should be like sisters, just like sisters," she added with a little sigh.

¹ *Kohl*, black antimony, used for the darkening of eyebrows and eyelashes.

I laughed merrily, for her last suggestion appeared to me intensely ridiculous.

"But papa mustn't see you in those dreadful clothes," cried Dilaram Khanūm; "the dear little chrysalis must become a beautiful butterfly at once."

And then the black boy Almaz appeared with his mistress's *kalian*, which she insisted on my smoking first, to the slave's intense astonishment. This, of course, I declined to do.

"You won't be so cruel as to deprive me of the pleasure of smoking after a real European lady?" cried the Nawab's daughter; and to please her I took a couple of whiffs from the beautiful pipe, the head of which was of delicately enamelled gold.

And then I was regaled with tea and sweetmeats, fruit and confectionery; meanwhile the private bath of the Nawab's daughter was prepared for my use, and she compelled me to select one of the handsomest costumes from a large and varied wardrobe, of which she was evidently very proud. And I was provided with a tiny new pair of slippers of lemon-coloured kid; various silken petticoats of all the colours of the rainbow; an outer skirt of pale-pink corded silk, with an edging of silver-lace; a *perhan* or shirt of black satin, and a tiny zouave

jacket of emerald-green velvet embroidered in gold, the open sleeves of which were lined with rose-coloured silk; to which was added a filmy Indian silk headkerchief covered with gold embroidery. And as I left the Nawab's private bath in this gay attire, I was pleased at the *frou-frou* of my silken garments, and I felt that it was very nice indeed to be once more dressed as a Persian lady of the upper class.

And then Dilaram Khanūm, who treated me as a friend and equal, insisted on hearing my history, and that kind lady shed genuine tears as I told the sad story of the deaths of my father and of my kind friend the Badr-u-Dowlet. But when she heard of the persecution to which I had been subjected in the Moollah Bashi's house, and of the supposed theft of my stepmother's jewels, she grew extremely indignant.

"We will get the jewels back for you, child, even though the Moollah Bashi's wife should have buried them in the lowest pit of hell! The dogs shall disgorge, or the Nawab, my father, will know the reason why."

But I said no word about the poisoning of poor Nanna Rejab. I knew that she had been basely done to death, but I had no proof.

Just then my conscience smote me, as it suddenly came to my mind that in my new-found sense of happiness and security I had for the time forgotten the very existence of poor Rejab, my humble friend and protector, the man who had shared his last crust with me, my father's old and trusted servant.

And then I begged the Nawab's daughter to ask for news of him, and the black boy hurried off to obey her commands.

Almaz came back smiling. "I have the honour to represent to the daughter of the Nawab," he said, "that the lady's servant informed the porter that he was leaving at sunset for the Bakhtiari country."

And so the faithful fellow, having placed me in safety, had disappeared. It was strange, passing strange. And then I broke down utterly, and I wept like a little child.

"Hush, Khanūm, hush!" whispered the Nawab's daughter in my ear, as she strove to comfort me. "Do not weep, child, or you will betray yourself. Did you love him, then, so very much, my poor darling? You have my sympathy, dear, for I too have loved unwisely in my time. But when a woman of position loves and loses her lover, child, if she weeps she

weeps in secret, when there is no one by. Think of your position, child. What would your stepmother, the Badr-u-Dowlet, have said if she could have seen those shameful tears of yours?"

It was with the greatest difficulty that I could disabuse the lady Dilaram's mind of her absurd idea.

"It's quite a common thing, you know," she said. "Is not the Imam Juma's daughter secretly married to the son of her father's steward? Is not the Eelbeggi's sister, as all Shiraz but the Eelbeggi himself knows, the wife of his favourite attendant, the handsome Ismaël? Bah! such things are common enough in Shiraz. He was a good and faithful servant, child — and, thank Heaven, good and faithful servants are ready to give even their lives for their masters or mistresses, particularly when their mistresses are young and pretty," she added, with a malicious little laugh. "Ah, Madge Khanūm," she said, "I'm afraid you're a sly little puss."

But she was convinced at last. And as I told her of our struggle with poverty in the little house by the Jaffirabad gate, she placed her arm affectionately round my neck, and wept kind tears of sympathy. And

I felt strangely drawn to this proud girl, who I now knew for certain had a heart.

And then we two dined together.

"You cannot see my father, the Nawab, till the morning," said my newly-found friend; "he is busy entertaining the Sahib who arrived but an hour ago. In the morning he will wait upon you, and be assured, child, he'll leave no stone unturned to burn the father¹ of that old hypocrite the Moollah Bashi."

And then mattresses and pillows were brought, and we partially disrobed, and I soon sank into an uneasy sleep, for the exciting events of the day had utterly upset me. It must have been about midnight that I was suddenly awakened. There were loud shouts, people with lights were running about upon the roofs, and an occasional shot was fired, while the barking of dogs could be heard in every direction.

"Don't let it trouble you, child," said Dilaram Khanūm, who was standing at the open window; "there has been a robbery somewhere in the neighbourhood, and I think that murder has been done, for there was the sound of a shot, and then a dreadful shriek from our

¹ "Burn the father," a Persian idiom signifying to persecute to the uttermost degree.

neighbour's, the Moollah Bashi's house — but they say that the thieves have got away. We shall hear the details in the morning."

It was true enough, and dreadful enough, as we learned afterwards. I was told that some one had thrown a stone through the window of the sleeping-apartment of the Moollah Bashi's wife. Zimrūd Khanūm had flung open the window and screamed to awaken her servants; then a gun was fired from the roof, and she fell dead, shot through the heart.

And then I knew only too surely that poor Rejab, being a Bakhtiari and a good son, had avenged his mother's death.

"People say in the Bazaar," said Dilaram Khanūm, "that the story of the robbers is all nonsense, and that the Moollah Bashi killed his old termagant of a wife himself."

But I knew better. I *knew* whose was the hand that had fired the shot.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SAHIB.

AT about eleven o'clock the next day the black boy Almaz raised the curtain, and, swelling with importance, addressed his mistress.

"May it please your ladyship, it is my humble petition in your ladyship's service, that his Excellency the Nawab your father desires to know if you will receive him."

"Tell the Nawab, my father," said my kind hostess, "may his shadow never grow less, that it is my petition that I humbly await his arrival."

"On my eyes, lady, on my eyes," said Almaz, making a low obeisance; and in a few minutes Houssein Khan Nawab entered the trim courtyard, his eyes decorously cast upon the ground. Half-a-dozen of his daughter's women-servants, each one carefully hiding the lower

portion of her face with her hands in her wimple, stood in a row at one side of the central path of the courtyard, and made him low obeisances as he passed, of which he took not the slightest notice, while Almaz strutted along in front to usher him into our presence. He wore a coat of Cashmere shawl, a jerkin of yellow satin, and a broad girdle of dark-grey shawl into which one hand was thrust. Over his shoulders was flung a voluminous cloak-like garment, with sleeves a yard in length, of fine English broadcloth, of a fawn colour, and on his head was a tall lambskin hat, the wool of which had tiny short natural curls and was dyed a jetty black. He had a long but scanty black beard, which reached nearly to his girdle, and which he continually stroked with his left hand. When he entered the room we both rose and bowed to him, and Dilaram Khanūm kissed his finger-tips.

My face was, of course, concealed by a veil, the corner of which I discreetly held over my chin and nose, and the Nawab, out of politeness and because he was a well-bred old gentleman, never looked up, but kept his eyes fixed upon my bare feet and ankles; and then he took the seat of honour, as a matter of course, on the lady Dilaram's mattress, which was placed by the window at the upper end of the room.

"You are very welcome, O my father; I trust that you are well?" said Dilaram.

"By your kindness, O my daughter, I am quite well," replied the Nawab. "And this lady——?"

"This lady, O Nawab, is a European lady, a full-blooded British subject."

Then the Nawab bowed to me. "It is wonderful, most wonderful," he said. "I trust that you are well in health, lady?"

"By your kindness, I am well," I replied.

"This lady," said Dilaram Khanūm, explanatorily, "is the daughter of Methuen Beg."

"Ah," said the Nawab, raising his eyebrows, and combing his beard with his fingers, "she who was robbed and murdered a month ago—most wonderful! And, of course, she speaks English? *Good morning.*"

I was so taken aback at this salutation that I didn't answer for a moment. "Good morning, Nawab," I replied at length; "I trust you are very well. I have come to you as a distressed British subject——" I began in English.

"Enough, lady," he replied in Persian, with a deprecatory gesture. "I have not sufficient English to understand the compliments you are doubtless paying me. I

possess only two phrases of your delightful language, *Good morning* and *Good-bye*. I am delighted to utter the first, may it never be my misfortune to use the second to you, O lady. And so you are the daughter of my friend Methuen Beg? But, O lady, why did you leave the house of your guardian the Moollah Bashi?"

And then I explained to him my reasons for leaving the Moollah Bashi's house. I narrated to him the details of the sudden death of my father and his wife the Badru-Dowlet. I told him of the persecutions I had suffered at the hands of the Moollah Bashi's wife, and how she had attempted to force me into a marriage with her son Mirza Jaffer, the Cross-Eyed.

"*Ajaib!* It is wonderful," cried the Nawab, tugging very hard indeed at his beard.

"My only safety was in flight," I went on. "I knew that the Moollah Bashi would produce a paper declaring him my guardian, to which my father's seal had been fraudulently attached; I had reason to believe that his wife was in possession of my stepmother's jewels, which had been secured about her person on the night of the earthquake; and I was afraid even to apply to your Excellency, lest, on the strength of the forged document,

I should be handed over to the tender mercies of my persecutors."

In my excitement the veil, which I had at first drawn over my face, had slipped back, and at the moment the old gentleman looked up.

"God forbid that one so beautiful should be placed in the power of that notorious rascal, Mirza Jaffer the Cross-Eyed," said the Nawab. "Don't veil, lady. I know the manners and customs of your countrywomen; I have visited Bombay, I have even attended the Governor's ball in my official capacity," he added, proudly. "Don't veil, lady; I am quite an old man and it doesn't matter."

And then I told him how I had lived in hiding with Nanna Rejab and her son, in the little house near the Jaffirabad gate; and how Mirza Jaffer had discovered us, and of the visit of the Moollah Bashi's wife, and how she had placed poison in the kettle, and how my poor old nurse had fallen a victim to her treachery.

"Zimrūd Khanūm took the wrong cat by the tail," he said, laconically; "she forgot that they were Bakh-tiaris: she has paid the forfeit, she has gone to her account."

"There could be no doubt of her crime," I said; and

then I told him of the visit of the native doctor, and of his experiment upon the unfortunate cat.

"There can be no doubt," he said. "Zimrūd Khanūm was a clever woman, but she did take the wrong cat by the tail; the most ingenious people make mistakes at times," he added, sympathetically. "Well, she is dead! But have you no papers, my child? has your father left no will? You see, we want some kind of proof. I believe you because you are an Englishwoman, but the Moollah Bashi is powerful; it will not be so easy a thing to make him disgorge—what he eats he digests. You have arrived opportunely, lady. There is an English Sahib here; he is an official of the All Powerful British Government. With his assistance I may be able to get at the bottom of this matter, and we may yet be too many for the Moollah Bashi. Ashes on his head! Veil yourself, my children; I will send for the Sahib."

Dilaram Khanūm hastily enveloped herself in a great sheet of embroidered muslin, and the boy Almaz, who had now brought the Nawab's water-pipe, was sent in quest of his master's guest. He presently returned, ushering into the courtyard a tall bearded Englishman wearing a big *sola topi* or pith helmet, and dressed in a complete suit of white linen.

My heart gave a jump as I saw this gentleman walk up the courtyard. "At last I am safe," I thought; "here is a real Englishman who'll be certain to take my part and to protect me." And then the Englishman was invited to enter, and a chair was brought from the *berūni* for him and placed in the centre of the room by one of the women-servants. Then the Nawab paid him a long string of compliments, to which he replied in fluent Persian, spoken with an execrable Indian accent.

"Sahib," said the Nawab, "this lady is your country-woman; she is the daughter of that excellent man, Methuen Beg."

The Englishman gave a start of surprise, and then he bowed silently to the Nawab.

"Perhaps," continued the British Agent, "you would like to examine her yourself; you will doubtless be able to ascertain if she is an impostor," he added, in a lower tone.

"On my eyes be it," replied the bearded Englishman in Persian. "Perhaps it would be as well, Nawab," he continued, "if I examine her in English,—I shall find it easier. What is your name, madam?" he began, looking generally at the pair of veiled figures who sat by the window.

"My name is Margaret Methuen, sir," I replied. "Whom have I the honour of addressing?"

"Good God, Madge! don't you know me?" cried the Englishman. "Have you forgotten Frank Reece?"

I couldn't answer him at first. I had never fainted in my life, but I felt very much inclined to faint then; and as in my excitement I seized the hand of the Nawab's daughter, I could hear, I could actually hear, my heart thumping against my ribs, and I felt that I could have died of very shame lest Frank should hear it too.

"When we parted, Mr Reece," I said, trying to speak calmly, "you didn't wear a beard, and your sun-helmet hides your face altogether."

"Good God, Madge!" he cried, "you don't doubt my identity, do you? Don't say that you have turned Mussulman! Don't tell me that you are married, and that I am too late!" he cried. "I have come to Persia on purpose to look for you, for things have changed now with me, you know, Madge: my father is dead, and it was my dearest hope, if I could only find my little sweetheart, that I might tell her how much I loved her, and ask her to be my wife. And now, Madge, I find you here," cried the poor fellow,

"dressed like a native woman, and perhaps I am too late, and you have probably forgotten my very existence. Don't tell me I am too late."

"You are just as impulsive as ever, Frank," I said, for I couldn't help mystifying the poor fellow a little. "The Nawab and I were just talking about my proposed marriage with the son of the Moollah Bashi."

"Then, thank God, I am *not* too late," cried Frank. "O Madge," he cried, apparently forgetting the existence of the Nawab and his daughter, "don't throw me over."

"I am wearing the little brooch, Frank," I said, raising my veil and giving him a momentary glimpse of it. "But I am a penniless orphan, Mr Reece; the very clothes I have on are not my own, and that little brooch of yours is all I have in the world. But the Moollah Bashi says that he is my guardian, and thinks that I ought to marry his son."

"But you don't care for him—you don't mean to say that you care for him?" cried Frank. "Oh, hang it, Madge, I never thought you'd want to sell yourself to a beast of a native. But you're laughing at me; you wouldn't tell me about my little rose if you didn't care for me. Put me out of my misery at once, there's a dear girl, and I'll make it all right with the old gentleman here."

"I suppose I had better put myself in your hands, Mr Reece," I said. "O Frank, I am so glad you have come, for latterly, since my father's death, my life has been a dreadful terror. There are some papers here," I went on, as I drew out my father's little pocket-book, "but they are in Persian, and though I speak the language fluently enough, much better than you do, I can't read yet, you know, Frank, at least not well enough to make them out,"—and as I stretched out my hand with the pocket-book, for I couldn't rise lest I should exhibit my naked ankles to Mr Reece, he stepped forward, and stooping down took the hand holding the pocket-book in his great browned paw and kissed it; and as he did so, Dilaram Khanūm drew herself up very stiffly and gave a little suppressed shriek beneath her veil.

"Be not ashamed, O my daughter," cried the Nawab, with a knowing smile; "it is the custom of their country, —a mighty pleasant custom too," he added. "Why, when I was in Bombay, the Sahibs were always kissing the hands of the European ladies, and then they would place their arms around their waists and drag them round and round the room to the sound of delicious music; even the old and ugly ones were dragged round and round, for among the Europeans, O my daughter, men are many and

women are few : it is the custom to kiss their hands and drag them round and round. If you want to drag round and round, Sahib," said the Nawab, politely, "don't hesitate. *Mashallah* ! I have seen the world, and understand the manners and customs of the Europeans."

"You can't do it without music," said Frank, very calmly, "at least not satisfactorily. I have to represent to your Excellency," he continued in his dreadful Indian-Persian, "that this lady is my betrothed wife. I came to Shiraz, in fact, with the intention of marrying her."

"God is great," remarked the Nawab, piously.

"We had better examine the contents of the pocket-book, I think," said Frank.

And then he and the Nawab went through the papers in a business-like way.

"Why, they're *barats*,¹ every one of them," cried the British Agent, "and receipts for money deposited at interest, and they are as good as golden *ashraffis*.² There are seven thousand *tomans*³ in all."

"Madge," cried Frank, "you are quite an heiress. You

¹ *Barat*, an order for the payment of money, a bill of exchange.

² The *ashraffi* is a coin of purest gold of which the best Persian jewellery is invariably manufactured.

³ £3500.

won't throw me over, dear, now that you're a rich woman, will you?" he added, with a little laugh.

"Don't tease me, Frank," I replied; and then, being a woman, I burst into tears, for my sudden change of fortune had upset me altogether.

"Then, Sahib," said the Nawab, addressing Frank, "there is another matter, and a very serious one. The Badr-u-Dowlet, the wife of the late Methuen Beg, predeceased him: he was a Mussulman, and therefore inherited the property of his wife. It is alleged that her jewels, which were very valuable, have come into the unlawful possession of the Moollah Bashi: he must be reckoned with, and with your permission, as this lady's next friend, I will take immediate steps to burn his father. May the punishment of the Merciful One fall upon the oppressor of the widow and the orphan," added the Nawab, piously.

Persians are great sticklers for the proprieties. Both the Nawab and his daughter had to be present at all my interviews with Frank, and these naturally had to take place in the *anderūn* or women's quarters. This love-making under difficulties was certainly rather hard for both Frank and myself. In the first place, on account of the servants, our interviews were nominally business

meetings relating to the settlement of my affairs, and, as a matter of course, the old Nawab was always present, for Dilaram Khanūm and I could not receive Frank alone—such a terrible breach of etiquette would have set all the tongues in Shiraz a-wagging: then, too, owing to the presence of the Nawab, it was *de rigueur* for me to wear my veil, and on account of Frank's sex, Dilaram had to wear hers. And if I hadn't been very, very sure of Frank, I think I should have felt a little jealous of the Nawab's daughter, for she was an egregious flirt by nature, and persisted in trying to captivate poor Frank; in fact, she hadn't the slightest idea of the duties of the person who is playing gooseberry. Whenever we spoke English she sulked and accused us of want of politeness, and from "Reece Sahib" she got to "Frank Sahib," and from "Frank Sahib" to "Frank"; and she would commence her remarks with "O my soul" when she was addressing *him*, which sounded highly indecorous, to say the least of it. And then she quoted poetry by the yard; and she used to sing to us occasionally, accompanying herself upon her lute, an accomplishment of which she was very proud; and she was always making eyes at poor Frank and trying to turn his head. And when we were alone I would remonstrate with her,

whereupon she would calmly retort that she wanted to share a little of my happiness, and that it was great fun to talk to a European just as though he were her brother. And when the old Nawab was not looking she would unveil in the most barefaced manner, and if I hadn't been quite, quite sure of Frank, I should have been really angry because he encouraged her quite unnecessarily; and then she was such a very pretty girl; and of course, in Frank's eyes the pretty Persian dress she wore, from its very novelty, made her all the more charming. But after all there was no real harm in her, and though I was very young I was wise enough to treat the whole matter as a joke.

But they did flirt, those two, in the most shameless way!

The Nawab, before Frank had been a week in Shiraz, had recovered all the monies due to my father, and I gave receipts for these sums as his heiress; but he was not at all hopeful as to getting possession of my step-mother's jewels. The Moollah Bashi pleaded in legal form to the Prince-Governor:—First, that he knew nothing about the jewels; secondly, that there was no proof that my father had not disposed of them before his death: that if he had not, then that they were lost on

the day of the earthquake ; that if Zimrūd Khanūm had obtained possession of them, she had done so without his knowledge ; and lastly, that they were a part of my marriage portion which would have been duly handed over on my wedding Mirza Jaffer, to whom he still insisted that I was solemnly betrothed ; and that in any case his wife had been murdered by Rejab the Bakhtiari at my instigation, in order to obtain possession of the jewels, and that, legally speaking, they were now in my possession, as it was common talk that I had been secretly married to Rejab, having quitted his house with that object.

“ It seems to me,” said the Nawab, “ that the suit may drag on for months, or even years. If Rejab really did steal the jewels, which is very unlikely, as he killed the Moollah Bashi’s wife out of revenge, we shall never see them again. If I could only severely bastinado the Moollah Bashi and so extract a confession, all might yet be well ; but only the Shah himself could bastinado the Arch-Priest of Shiraz. The fact is, we have no witnesses : the mother of Rejab is dead ; Rejab himself has, of course, fled to the Bakhtiari country ; the Moollah Bashi and his son and his servants will naturally swear anything. I must try and frighten something out of

him, or obtain some sort of compromise; but it will take time, and the expenses will be heavy: the Prince-Governor and his secretaries must be bribed; the Sheikh-ul-Islam and the Imam Juma must both be bribed. The King and the Prime Minister will require a large sum, and then, if we obtain an order from the Shah in our favour, we shall find that the Moollah Bashi has denuded himself of his property, and that it will be impossible to recover a black *pul*.¹ Or take the event that we succeed in obtaining a portion of the money; then the relations of the Badr-u-Dowlet will contest our right, and, being wealthy and powerful people, you would have to expend large sums, and the suit might drag on for years in Teheran. A compromise with the Moollah Bashi is our only chance."

And then Frank addressed me very solemnly. "Little woman," he said, "we had better leave the whole matter in the Nawab's hands. We must go to England at once, for I have to look into my late father's affairs. Besides, we want to get married; and we can't get married here, that's very certain. We have both had quite enough of the glowing East, and we can't do better than get married by the Consul at

¹ A *pul* is a copper coin, value one farthing.

Bushire, and then go home by way of Bombay in the P. and O. boat." And then he coolly turned round to the Nawab and announced what he called *my* decision.

And I—well, I of course let Frank have his own way in the matter.

And so it was arranged, and we carried out that simple programme to the letter.

When we left Shiraz, the Nawab made me a present of a beautiful inlaid box of Shiraz workmanship; and I have promised Frank that, whenever we do recover my stepmother's jewels, we will keep them in that gorgeous wedding-present of ours.

I have used the Nawab's casket as a workbox for thirty years. I am afraid it will never serve me as a jewel-case.

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